

Election 2005 Bulletin #2

March 30, 2005

On May 17, 2005, British Columbians will go to the polls to elect our next provincial government. The official election period begins on April 19. In the lead up to the election, BCACL will provide you with election tools and updates.

Bulletin #1 provided a self advocacy election guide called *Information and Participation Guide, Get the Vote Out*.

Bulletin #2 includes BCACL's March 17, 2005 letter to the Premier focusing on the provincial budget for community living supports and services. The letter outlines BCACL's key areas of concern and calls for the following actions by government:

- Increase the community living budget for both children and adults;
- Announce a strategic plan to address waitlists; and
- Continue to support the Community Living Restructuring Fund.

We encourage you to raise these same issues in meetings with MLA's and all candidates during the election.

A copy of the letter to the Premier has been sent with a covering letter (also included) to all BC MLA's.

Lobby Meetings with MLA's

BCACL is pleased that so many of you are getting meetings with your Members of the Legislative Assembly. It is important for everyone who is affected by MCFD's budget to voice their concerns! We encourage everyone to meet with your MLA's to share the key messages relating to community living supports and services.

To find your MLA and their contact information, see:
<http://www.legis.gov.bc.ca/mla/3-1-1.htm>.

BCACL Election Kit

Watch for Bulletin #3 which will include an election kit.

March 17, 2005

«MLA»
«Riding»
«Constituency_Address»

Dear MLA,

The BC Association for Community Living (BCACL) is a provincial federation that advocates for justice, rights and opportunities for children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities and their families. We are writing to you today to raise urgent concerns about the failure of the provincial budget to address the critical shortage of services and supports for individuals with disabilities and families in BC.

The Minister of Finance recently declared the province to be on the verge of a "golden decade," and promised to "build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities" and those with special needs. Indeed, for the last three years, BCACL has been actively working with community and government partners to create a community living service system that will result in more flexible and responsive supports for individuals and families.

But the current budget for community living will not support the creation of the system we envisioned. It will not allow the new authority, Community Living B.C., to address the growing waitlists for services and supports. In fact, it will create a reality that is far from a "golden decade" for people with disabilities and their families.

Enclosed you will find a copy of our recent letter to Premier Gordon Campbell, outlining our grave concerns about the community living budget. Our letter provides examples of what this budget means in real terms for individuals and families who are desperately in need of help.

These individuals and families will be speaking up during the upcoming election, and raising this as an election issue.

We urge you to hold the current government to its promise of a "golden decade" for people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

John Kehler,
President

Encl: 1

Supporting people with developmental disabilities and their families

March 17, 2005

Via Facsimile: 250-387-0087

Hon. Gordon Campbell
Premier of British Columbia
PO Box 9041, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Campbell:

We are writing to you to express our absolute dismay at the recent budget announcements with regard to community living supports for children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families. They demonstrate an alarming failure to address the critical shortage in services and supports for individuals and families in this province.

As a provincial organization that advocates for people with developmental disabilities and their families, the BC Association for Community Living has spoken out for years about these critical shortages:

- children waiting so long for "early Intervention" services that they outgrow them before they became available
- families spiraling into crisis without the supports they need
- waitlists for services growing longer year after year

As efforts to turn around BC's economy recently brought news of a surplus of over \$2 billion, we believed that the your government would make good on its promise that the necessary supports would be there for children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families.

Over the past three years, **\$150 million** has been taken out of the budget for services to adults with developmental disabilities. The budget "increases" announced in February will mean that Community Living BC has just barely enough resources to manage urgent crises, and will not be able to address the waitlists for the year 2005/06. In the years following, they will once again fall behind.

Within the budget for special services to children, inflation, labour costs and demographic changes have resulted in an effective cut to services. The recent budget will not keep up with growing demands based on demographics, and beyond 2005/06 we will see the further erosion of children's services.

Despite the best efforts of the community over the last three years to find cost efficiencies that could enable reinvestment in much-needed services, the waitlists have continued to grow. Now, the only way that Community Living BC will be able to stay within its budget for 2006/07 will be to significantly reduce direct services. This is nothing short of a betrayal of the community living movement and the many individuals and families who have worked so hard over the last three years to create a more responsive and flexible system of supporting people.

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Supporting people with developmental disabilities and their families

So we write to ask you – what do we say to families in BC?

- What do we say to the mother of the 3½ -year-old, who is anxious about ensuring her son gets needed physiotherapy but has been told that the waitlist is so long that her child may “age out” of the “early intervention” waitlist?
- What do we say to the parents who are experiencing total burnout in caring for their child with special needs and have been told that they may wait 5 to 8 years for respite support?
- What do we say to the mother of four children, two with disabilities, who is off work on medical leave waiting for a life-saving organ transplant and has been refused respite childcare because she is not working?
- What do we say to the senior parents who have been caring for their daughter for 45 years and would dearly love her to be settled into a new supported living situation before they are no longer able to look after her?
- What do we say to the hundreds of families who have sons and daughters with disabilities leaving the public school system with nowhere to turn?

Are we to tell these people to join the hundreds of others who are in the same boat, year after year, with no hope in sight?

This year 58 people were on a waitlist for residential support in Delta; 59 adults were waiting for day program supports in the Simon Fraser region; 34 families were waiting for respite in Surrey; and in Maple Ridge, 78 families were waiting for child care workers. These waitlists are echoed throughout our province. With no plan to address this growing crisis, it is certainly not a “golden decade” that people with developmental disabilities and their families can look forward to.

We urge you to **reconsider the community living budget** for both children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families. We urge you to announce a **strategic plan to address waitlists** over the next three years. We also urge your government to continue to **support the Community Living Restructuring Fund** through the Victoria Foundation, which has proven to be an extremely cost-effective way to address many transition issues.

We urge you to do right by those people who are counting on you and your government for support.

Sincerely,

John Kehler,
President