



2022 Submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

The Federation of Community Social Services of BC

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this committee's important work. My name is Rick FitzZaland and I am the Executive Director of The Federation of Community Social Services of BC.

The Federation represents a group of over 140 community-based social services organizations serving more than 250 communities across BC, both on and off recognized First Nations territories. Our member organizations represent nearly \$1 billion of non-charitable revenue and offer a broad range of services and programs that support BC's families, children and youth, seniors, people living with addictions or mental health issues, and low-income families and individuals.

As most of you know, many of the services that the provincial government provides to the people of BC are actually done so through contracts with organizations and businesses. These include programs and supports for families, young people involved in the child protection system, people with disabilities, folks trying to find jobs, newcomers to BC, and older adults. This is what I mean when I speak about community social services. And the importance of these services is what I urge this committee to consider as you make recommendations for the next provincial budget.

What is needed

The community social services sector addresses issues that many people in society prefer to ignore or avoid. We care for those who need care, support those who have no one else, and advocate on behalf of the people and populations who have been left out of the policies and programs that cater to the more visible and dominant groups in society.

The people we serve—low-income families, people with disabilities, kids in care, seniors, folks struggling with their mental health—are often blamed for their situation, as if it were a choice or a character flaw rather than a symptom of colonialism, racism, bureaucracy, and stigma. But we benefit from the laws and systems that neglect them and it is our duty to right those wrongs.

We need to address that inequity. We need to establish more equitable relationships with the families and communities we have ignored and mistreated. We need to expand our province's social care system and strengthen its social safety net. Our overall priorities for the next provincial budget can be summarized by the three following recommendations.

1. Continue to demonstrate a commitment to reconciliation and decolonization of social services by working to address funding inequities that exist for Indigenous, off-reserve service providers.

Serious funding inequities for Indigenous organizations, especially Indigenous child welfare organizations, have been documented for years. Most notable was the landmark decision of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in 2016¹ which found that the federal funding model for Indigenous child welfare was flawed and discriminatory and in violation of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*.

A 2022 report by the BC Representative for Children and Youth² found that funding inequities in our province leave Indigenous agencies short-staffed and unable to provide adequate services and supports, with social workers at Indigenous agencies often carrying twice the recommended caseload. The report makes it very clear: the MCFD system for allocating funding is broken; different children are allocated different levels of funding based on location and organization which amounts to fiscal discrimination.

There are staffing positions at urban Indigenous organizations that are paid less than the comparable positions at a non-Indigenous organization. There are Indigenous organizations that are now comparing contracts non-Indigenous organizations to get proof of the discrepancies and leverage they can use in contract negotiations. But Indigenous organizations shouldn't have to research and litigate their neglect. They shouldn't be expected to provide the same services as non-Indigenous agencies, with less money and fewer resources.

Changes are happening at the federal level and it is time this government addressed the significant and discriminatory funding inequities that exist for Indigenous, off-reserve service providers. The evidence is clear. No more studies or evaluations are needed. Indigenous organizations more than deserve to be compensated at a fair and equitable rate and this government needs to invest in making that a priority.

1. [LINK](#)

2. [LINK](#)

2. Continue to demonstrate a commitment to reconciliation and decolonization by making new investments in services and supports for children in care.

In 2010, The Federation, in partnership with MCFD, conducted a comprehensive review of the residential care practices for children and youth in BC. The scope of this review included residential care services, child welfare and protection, youth justice, children and youth with support needs, and child and youth mental health service streams.

Since 2012, when the report was completed and released, we have been advocating for and working with the government on implementing the 32 recommendations and supporting actions. Unfortunately, this is an area of MCFD practice that has not seen the same transformative investments that other service areas have seen. It is also one that affects a disproportionate number of Indigenous families.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's first *Call to Action*³ says that governments must provide adequate resources to enable Indigenous communities and child welfare organizations to keep families together where it is safe to do so and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.

I am proud to say that plans are being worked on. We have been meeting with our government colleagues on a project called Specialized Homes and Support Services and we are supportive of and highly engaged in that planning. However, we have yet to see or hear anything about funding to implement the work we are doing together.

There have been investments in other service areas like childcare and children and youth with support needs. Those were very necessary and are going to have an impact. We want to see the same commitment and investment in this service area and this budget line.

To keep children out of care, there needs to be a transformational investment of funding for the MCFD budget line: Child Safety, Family Support and Children in Care Services. And we urge you to focus that investment on the 'Family Support' as much as the other areas'. Because we have seen, over the past decade, that focusing primarily on the child safety aspect of MCFD services has done almost nothing to effect change in the system of care.

3. [LINK](#)

We need to keep kids out of care and doing that involves supporting and empowering families in caring for their own kids. Child safety could and should look like mental health services, childcare, culturally appropriate counselling, and wraparound services that preclude the need to remove a child in the first place. This is how we will improve outcomes. This is how we will change the trajectory of families already involved in the child welfare system.

Too often, children end up in care as a result of poverty or unaddressed substance use issues or support needs that are too much for a caregiver to handle on their own. If this government truly cares for families and truly believes in reconciliation, it should be a priority to re-imagine how child protection is understood and approached and it should be given an investment that will truly and finally transform the system of care.

3. Continue to invest in the sustainability of the social services sector by addressing the rising cost of business pressures that organizations are facing and build this into base contract dollars.

There are efforts underway to address some of the sustainability issues that our sector is facing such as wage disparity and procurement processes. However, our sector has been misunderstood and underfunded for decades while costs have continued to rise.

The funding formula for administration in our contracts has never been close to fair. Our member organizations use decades-old technology and have to fundraise to be able to provide supervision to their workers. There are dedicated staff who have been caring for our kids, seniors, and family members with disabilities for years but still make so little that they qualify for social housing.

According to the *2021 BC Labour Market Outlook*, the 2020 median wage rate for a social and community service worker was \$21.00.⁴ Working 40 hours a week for 52 weeks, that is an annual salary of \$43,680 which is low enough to qualify for 1-bedroom social housing in Squamish, Kelowna, Victoria, and Vancouver according to the 2021 Housing Income Limits⁵ established by BC Housing.

And based on the *Social Services Labour Market Research Project Final Report* there are over 13,000 social and community service workers in the Vancouver, Victoria,

4. [LINK](#)

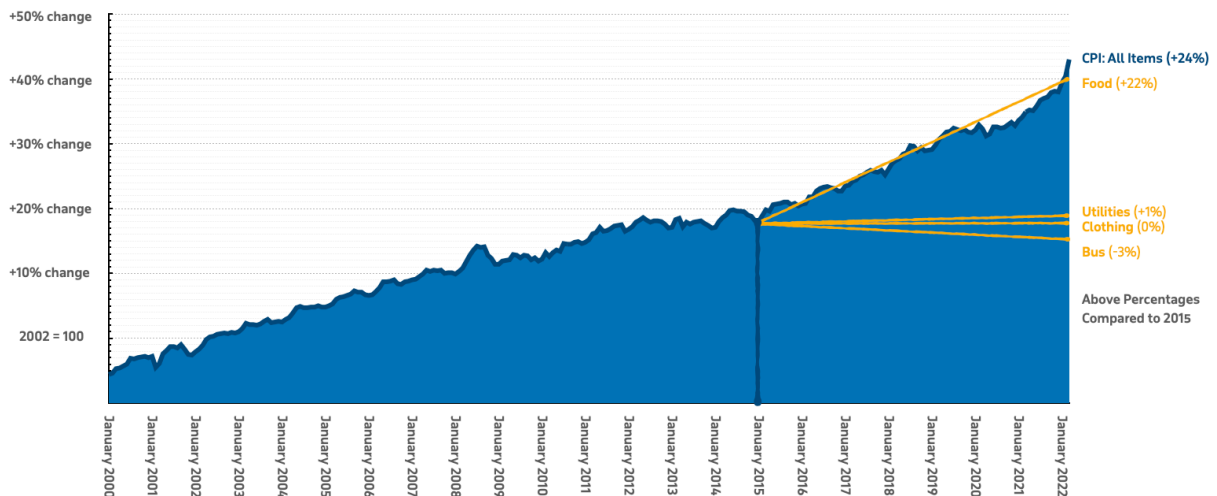
5. [LINK](#)

and Kelowna census metropolitan areas as of 2016. If those workers had children and needed a two-bedroom apartment, they would qualify for social housing in 13 additional markets (for a total of 17) including Terrace, Dawson Creek, Nanaimo, Vernon, Penticton, Kamloops, Abbotsford, and Chilliwack.

There are tens of thousands of caring and giving BC community social service workers whose full-time annual salary is so low that an agency of this government says they qualify for subsidized housing. These are the people who kept daycares open and safe through the pandemic. These are the counsellors who are tackling our province's mental health crisis. These are the folks taking care of our seniors and the people helping our family members with their substance use issues.

They deserve better.

They deserve a formal, public commitment from the government (not just one ministry) to work with us on developing a new approach to funding core costs for the provision of community social services. They also deserve an immediate investment to address the rising cost of business pressures that organizations are facing built into base contract dollars. Because, as you can see below, most of the contracts that have increased are only attempting to keep up with workload, not costs.



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 18-10-0004-01. Consumer Price Index, monthly, not seasonally adjusted. [LINK](#).

The chart above shows the rate of inflation in BC since 2000 (2002 = 100) according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The orange lines represent the change in contract funding for one Federation member's youth residential program in the Fraser region

from 2015 to 2022. Food is the only budget item where contract funding has even remotely kept up with program costs.

We believe a modest and fully supportable investment should be an immediate 5% baseline increase for all contracts. And future contracts should be indexed either to the rate of inflation or a comparable metric. Other models for indexing contracts and payments to keep up with the cost of living exist throughout the province. (For example, the UBC Staff Pension Plan payments increase at a rate of 50% of the change in the Consumer Price Index each year; BC's Municipal Pension Plan increases based on the annual change in the CPI to a maximum of 2.1% for 2020-2022.) Such an investment is not only deserved but necessary and long overdue.

Conclusion

We are dealing with overlapping crises. More and more people are struggling. The world is changing faster than we may have been prepared for. In order to deal with the issues we are facing, as well as ones to come, significant and brave investments into our social care system must be made.

And these investments need to focus on community-based approaches rather than existing institutional and colonial models. There are networks of services that are based on community relationships—some represented by The Federation, others by Indigenous-led organizations. Where there have been successes, it is in these relationship-based services and models. The old institutional and colonial systems and approaches have failed and will continue to fail.

This government has given us some very important jobs to do—helping women escape violence, supporting kids in care, helping people overcome substance use issues, and caring for seniors. So help us to do those jobs as best we can. Invest in these programs and services as if you or someone you love will need them. Because according to the numbers, you or someone you love will.

Rick FitzZaland, Executive Director

The Federation of Community Social Services of BC