

Disability Alliance BC
Care of Helaine Boyd
Sent via email

October 5, 2024

Dear Helaine Boyd and Members of DABC,

Thank you for submitting these important questions to us. Disability Alliance BC does critical work across BC to advocate for people with disabilities in our communities. Throughout our response, you will see us use “people with disabilities” and “disabled people” interchangeably, recognizing that we don’t have the opportunity to ask readers what they prefer, and our disabled NDP membership uses both.

This is a pivotal moment in our province – David Eby and the BC NDP are working hard to ensure that equity-deserving groups have a government that respects their rights, cares about their needs, and prioritizes their interests.

We have more work to do to ensure people with disabilities in BC can enjoy the same opportunities as people without disabilities. When our BC NDP government passed the Accessible BC Act, we knew this was an important step, and part of work that has been underway for decades – led by people with lived experience and disability-serving organizations.

The work led by our Accessibility Directorate and Advisory Committee laid the foundation for further action in the upcoming years. Some of the BC NDP’s plans are detailed explicitly in our platform. Other commitments, if we are elected, would come out of continued work to implement the Accessible BC Act.

Poverty Reduction

The BC NDP recognizes that for a variety of reasons, people with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty. We’re determined to see disabled British Columbians enjoy full inclusion in their communities. The Province’s obligations are now enshrined in law.

We will adjust spousal clawbacks and ensure British Columbians continue to receive the full level of benefits provided by the Government of Canada. There are further measures identified in the 2024 Poverty Reduction Strategy that we intend to explore, if elected.

Due to rising interest rates, corporate gouging, and inflation, many people across BC are struggling with affordability, which we’ve emphasized throughout our platform. In addition to making life more affordable and avoiding unnecessary costs for all, we’re

excited about what our move toward efficient and effective government could do in the area of accessibility. We're concerned by the amount of time and energy people with disabilities use to navigate services that are intended to make life easier. We plan to work with disabled people, groups like DABC, and our Accessibility Directorate to ensure that our plans to modernize government also address accessibility issues.

A Conservative government under John Rustad is a risk we can't afford. DABC was there when John Rustad was a cabinet minister with the BC Liberals for many years and made life much harder for people with disabilities. For nine years, disability rates under his government remained stagnant, and many disability-related services and supports were cut completely. When bus passes for disabled people were revoked, many people, families and supporters protested at the legislature. Their voices were ignored. This would be the type of government that we would expect under John Rustad.

If elected, we hope to continue working with you to prevent poverty for people with disabilities and support those who are already experiencing it.

Transit

Getting people in BC where they need to go, quickly and easily, is a key priority within our NDP platform. It will help us meet our climate goals and will allow people to spend less time in traffic.

If elected, a BC NDP government would connect our communities through expanded rapid transit options, and make it more affordable for people to take public transit. The people within this province are diverse, and the way we get from A to B is diverse, too. For those who need to drive, we'll take care of core infrastructure to reduce road congestion, and we'll improve active transportation for people that can't or don't drive, for whatever reason. Ensuring that universal design principles are incorporated into transit planning has been identified as a key government priority in response to the Accessible BC Act, and this is something we're keen to explore for upcoming transit projects.

As part of our platform, we've also determined that HandyDART will be government operated, which will ensure that when issues arise, government can take action to resolve them and prevent further issues in the future.

Housing

The delivery of suitable and secure housing for people with disabilities is a priority area for us. When our NDP government passed the Accessible BC Act, BC Housing was selected as a pilot organization to respond to the Act and report back on progress. Early measures were completed with the understanding that engagement work would continue.

We intend to increase the supply of suitable housing by using the BC Building Code, which will require all new housing units to be adaptable, starting spring of 2025. At least 5% of homes built through provincial funding must be fully wheelchair accessible. All common amenity spaces must also be fully wheelchair accessible.

The BC NDP platform includes further funding for non-market housing, and we're in the process of determining how this funding will be used.

Finally, we're working to improve housing for people with disabilities that live with a caregiver. The BC NDP will improve homeshare rates through Community Living BC. This also opens up opportunities for more people with disabilities to stay with their loved ones.

Healthcare

The BC NDP agrees that healthcare is an equity issue. When we formed government in 2017, one of our first priorities was to get rid of unfair MSP fees, which had been doubled under John Rustad and his old BC Liberal government. Since becoming leader of the BC NDP, David Eby has been taking action to train and hire more doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers than ever before.. We've connected 248,000 people to a family doctor or nurse practitioner since July 2023 – with 160,000 more matched in the next six months. With this pace, we will make sure everyone who wants a family doctor or nurse practitioner gets one by the end of 2025.

We are committed to bringing down costs for people in rural, remote, and First Nation communities who need to travel for specialist health care services by expanding the Travel Assistance Program to include mileage for car travel. And we'll cover travel expenses before they're due for payment, so people aren't paying out of pocket and waiting for a refund.

Our platform also includes expanded access to mental health supports and counselling, including a fund to increase services in the community. We're also committing to increased mental health supports in schools, increased support staff in schools, and better programming for students with disabilities.

Discrimination in healthcare was already illegal before the Accessible BC Act was passed, but there will be further opportunities to make service delivery more accessible through its continued implementation. The BC NDP government's decision to restore the BC Human Rights Commission, gutted by Rustad's previous government, is another tool to help combat discrimination in all its forms.

John Rustad's Conservatives plan is to cut billions from the healthcare budget, privatize services, and invest in corporate profits instead of people. This would hurt us all, but for people who use our healthcare system to manage ongoing conditions, this approach would be especially hard on them and their families.

We know there's more work to do, which is why we can't risk losing the progress we've made. Healthcare should always be there when you need it. And David Eby won't stop until the job is done.

We look forward to working together to strengthen healthcare in BC.

Accessible BC Act

If elected, we would continue to work on implementing the Accessible BC Act with the guidance of people with lived experience and organizations that support people with disabilities in the community.

The BC NDP will also continue to work with people with disabilities to implement the first two standards - Accessible Service Delivery and Employment Accessibility - which will remove barriers for people with disabilities to access services and goods, and to prevent barriers in hiring, training and retention.

All relevant organizations must uphold their obligations under the Accessibility Act, which does not permit organizations to hold off on implementation until they receive a specialized pool of funding. At the same time, a BC NDP government would work through the Directorate to ensure that organizations are resourced to meet expectations across the board – including equitable and accessible services for disabled British Columbians.