

December 8, 2020

Hon. Nicholas Simons
Minister of Social Development & Poverty Reduction
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Victoria BC V8W 9R2
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Dear Minister Simons,

Disability Alliance BC (DABC) would like to extend our congratulations on your recent appointment as Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. Our organization has a long established and positive working relationship with the Ministry, including most recently the fourteen community-based projects which will receive \$450,000 in government funding to increase accessibility and community inclusion, for which DABC provided support in the grant review process. We look forward to continual engagement between us as we work to address the issues facing people with disabilities in BC.

DABC would also like to take this opportunity to outline the current, pressing issues we wish to see reflected in policy change. We are heartened to hear that the BC Government remains committed to introducing accessibility legislation in spring 2021, and so we hope that the below issues will be safeguarded when drafting policy arising out of that legislation.

1. Income and Disability Assistance Rates

DABC requests that the Ministry make permanent the \$300 COVID-19 supplement for income assistance and disability assistance recipients, further indexed for inflation.

Despite rate increases in recent years, we know that income and disability assistance are below the poverty line and are woefully inadequate to meet even basic needs. The \$300 supplement has meant that in the context of a pandemic, some income assistance and disability assistance recipients have finally been able to meet basic needs, and are not making impossible decisions between essentials like food, medication, rent, and utilities. This should not be reserved for extraordinary times, but rather considered part of a holistic plan to support an “inclusive economic recovery” as stated in your mandate letter.

2. Comprehensive Program for Assistive Devices and Medical Equipment

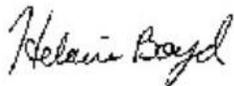
DABC requests that the Ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, establish a comprehensive program for assistive devices and medical equipment for people with disabilities. In comparison with other provinces, BC provides much less support and resources on this issue, and while DABC recognizes there are some financial assistance available for adults in accessing devices through MSDPR, we believe that eligibility for this assistance is restrictive, causing further barriers for people who need it the most. We note that the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services recommended that the government invest in a comprehensive program for assistive devices and medical equipment for people with disabilities in the 2021 Budget, and we hope that your Ministry will follow through on this recommendation.

3. Affordable and Accessible Housing

DABC requests that, in collaboration with Minister David Eby, major new investments are made in providing affordable, accessible housing. We recognize this is an issue affecting many people and families across the province. This is a particular challenge for people with disabilities given the overwhelming demand for accessible housing.

Thank you again for your consideration of these issues. We welcome further dialogue to engage with yourself and the Ministry on ways to positively impact the lives of people with disabilities.

Sincerely,



Helaine Boyd
Executive Director, Programs and Policy
Disability Alliance BC



Andrew Robb
Staff Lawyer
Disability Alliance BC

CC: John Horgan, Premier
David Galbraith, Deputy Minister
Dan Coulter, Parliamentary Secretary – Accessibility
Niki Sharma, Parliamentary Secretary – Community Development and Non Profits