

BC Election 2020: Disability Alliance BC (DABC) Questions for Parties

1. Income and Disability Assistance Rates

In April 2020, the provincial government introduced a \$300 COVID-19 supplement for income assistance and disability assistance recipients; this was initially set for a three-month period, and has been extended through December 2020. We would like to see this \$300 increase made permanent for both income and disability assistance, and rates further indexed to inflation.

Despite 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.

If elected, would your government make the \$300 increase permanent for both income and disability assistance, and index rates to inflation?

2. Comprehensive Program for Assistive Devices and Medical Equipment

BC is in dire need of a comprehensive program for assistive devices and medical equipment for people with disabilities. An assistive device is a technology that helps promote independence and safety (e.g. equipment and devices that aid in areas such as mobility, vision, hearing, communication, breathing, and self care).

Other provinces and territories in Canada have programs ensuring broad access to these devices. This is not the case here in BC, where coverage for assistive devices is piecemeal and confusing. Most financial assistance available for for adults for these devices is through the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR) for people who qualify for PWD and other narrow categories of income support. People with disabilities that do not qualify for these restrictive programs are left to purchase expensive medical equipment on their own or seek help from non-profits and charities.

In its report following the 2021 Budget consultation, 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.

If elected, would your government invest in a comprehensive program for assistive devices and medical equipment for people with disabilities?

3. Accessibility Legislation

British Columbians with disabilities routinely experience barriers to accessing housing, employment, transportation, and other services. The Canadian government recently introduced accessibility legislation which governs areas under federal jurisdiction. Prior to the pandemic, the provincial government had committed to provincial accessibility legislation, and conducted consultations for feedback on new laws, standards and policies to better support people with disabilities to live with dignity and to meaningfully participate in their communities.

If elected, would your government commit to completing and enacting accessibility legislation for BC with enforceable standards and regulations for areas under provincial jurisdiction?

4. Independent Mental Health Advocacy Services for Mental Health Detainees

In March 2019 the BC Ombudsperson recommended that the province create a legal aid service to provide independent legal advice and advocacy to people when they are detained under the *Mental Health Act*.¹ The BC Attorney General accepted this recommendation and committed to seeking the appropriate funds to establish it; however, the service has not yet been created.

Independent Mental Health Advocacy (“IMHA”) services are person-centered advocacy models designed to promote self-determination and recovery for people subject to mental health detention and other coercive interventions. An IMHA service has the potential to profoundly improve access to justice for a marginalized population. Ensuring that everyone has access to legal advice and assistance to exercise their legal rights is a therapeutic exercise that can promote well being and improve access to quality care in BC’s mental health and addictions system.

If elected, would your government create a legal aid service to provide independent legal advice and advocacy to people when they are detained under the Mental Health Act?

5. Community Care

We have a crisis in our care system for people with disabilities. Far too often, people with disabilities who live in their own homes are struggling to find care workers,

¹ BC Ombudsperson’s Special Report No. 42, *Committed to Change: Protecting the Rights of Involuntary Patients under the Mental Health Act*, March 2019.

particularly during this pandemic, putting their health at risk as they try to manage with less support than they need. Working-aged adults with disabilities who have no other care option than to live in long term care facilities are faced with care that is designed for seniors, and simply does not meet their needs. As the province looks to “build back better,” the voices and needs of these people with disabilities must be considered.

If elected, would your government commit to improving the delivery of community care by including the voices of people with lived experience of these situations to ensure that they have the supports they need to live with dignity and independence?

6. Affordable and Accessible Housing

As you know, housing affordability continues to be one of the biggest challenges for people and families across the province. This is a particular challenge for people with disabilities given the dearth of accessible housing.

While the dire need for affordable and accessible housing is not new, the pandemic has added a new dimension to the issue. With public health directives from all levels of government encouraging us to stay home to stop the spread of COVID-19, many without homes were left without safe spaces to self-isolate.

If elected, would your government make major new investments in affordable and accessible housing?

