

October 21st, 2020

Thank you for your inquiry into how the B.C. Greens will support greater inclusion of those with disabilities in our province. Please find our response detailed below.

Sincerely,  
Sonia Furstenau  
Leader, B.C. Green Party  
B.C. Green Candidate, Cowichan Valley

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## **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?***

Yes, the B.C. Greens are committed to significant improvements to our social safety net, including the initial step of making the \$300 crisis supplement permanent and indexing assistance to inflation going forward. We have made this commitment in our platform. Our priority is to ensure that all British Columbians enjoy income security and to eliminate the fear of being unable to afford the necessities of life. We believe we can move towards this goal by integrating the principles of basic income - simplicity, economic security, and reduced stigma - into our social safety net. We entrench people in poverty with programs we have right now, but this is because of political decisions that can be changed. We believe that everyone has the right to a healthy, dignified life. We would therefore begin a transition towards basic income with the following initial steps:

- Increase income assistance and PWD levels, beginning with making the \$300 crisis supplement permanent and indexing assistance to inflation;
- Eliminate the asset test; and
- Reduce clawbacks on earned income to reduce the disincentive to work.

As we rebuild, we can't afford to go back to our old patchwork of social supports that weren't meeting the needs of people. We need to build a more resilient social safety net, that lifts people up and doesn't leave anyone behind.

## **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 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?***

One of our core commitments is to revitalize the healthcare system, so that everyone has efficient access to quality healthcare in our province. Assistive devices and medical equipment are a necessity for many, and we strongly believe that government should play a role in supporting financial access to these pivotal technologies for those living with disabilities. This includes working with the Disability Association of BC and other experts in the field to determine how best to approach a comprehensive program to ensure affordable access to devices and equipment.

## **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 govern 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?*

Yes, the B.C. Greens commit to completing and enacting legislation specific to accessibility, building off of the work done under the previous government but not completed. We know how important it is to people's wellbeing to be able to participate in their communities, and would ensure that this legislation makes a meaningful impact on reducing barriers.

#### **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*.<sup>1</sup> 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?*

We commit to modernizing mental health services in British Columbia as outlined in our platform, and improving the Mental Health Act in an inclusive and equitable way is a key part of this process. The BC NDP proposed amendments to the Mental Health Act this past summer that would have had unintended consequences for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour through the practice of involuntary detainment of youth. We can and should do so much more to ensure that the array of voluntary, culturally and ability appropriate harm reduction, treatment and support services are available for British Columbians.

We also recognize that some treatment has the potential to be coercive. Working in partnership with experts and those with lived experience, we commit to ensuring that those detained under the Mental Health Act have the proper legal aid and advocacy to ensure that their rights are valued and their wellbeing is respected in all potential detainments under this Act. We commit to reviewing the Ombudsperson's report on IMHA services and identifying avenues to move this forward efficiently and with adequate funding.

#### **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, 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?*

The B.C. Greens believe in compassionate governance and a COVID-19 recovery that builds a more equitable province and doesn't leave anybody behind. We will work with stakeholders and people with lived experience to support the dignity and independence of those living with disabilities, and ensure that we have adequate resources and policy to improve delivery of community care. We have proposed improvements in how our seniors' care is delivered, and know that all who need support are equally deserving of adequate care that supports them to live with dignity. We have also committed to establishing caregivers as a recognized healthcare profession with the salary they deserve, as part of our platform on healthcare.

## **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?*

Yes. the B.C. Greens are committed to a fair housing strategy that has a clear goal of ensuring everybody has an affordable home that meets their needs. To achieve this we need a comprehensive suite of policies to deal with the housing affordability crisis for all, including significant expansion of building new affordable and accessible homes.

We would take steps to expand diverse forms of housing in our communities and ensure that our housing is affordable and accessible for people from all backgrounds. This would include a housing first approach, accelerating investments to affordable, supportive and social housing on a priority basis, and establishing a capital fund to support the acquisition and maintenance of rental housing by nonprofits to maintain affordable rental units and address the financialization of the rental market.

We have also committed to establishing a housing office specifically charged with assisting people with disabilities and youth aging-out to find suitable accommodation and supporting the transition.

We will also introduce a rental supplement that will close the gap between affordable rent and what renters are actually paying, through a means-tested grant that applies to low and moderate income earners who are paying more than 30% of their income in rent. We would work with stakeholders to review the portable rent supplements that BC Housing currently provides and ensure that new rental supplements are meeting the needs of people with disabilities and helping them find suitable and affordable accommodation.