



BCEdAccess

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BCEdAccess acknowledges these are unprecedented circumstances that impact us all. As we come together in support of the BC government's actions to stop the spread of Covid-19, we would like to highlight the urgent need for an immediate action plan for an inter-ministerial, coordinated and inclusive approach for children, youth and adults with disabilities, and their families and caregivers.

It's important to note that these are not concerns about learning at this time. Those are also worries that families are feeling and we look forward to providing feedback on that matter at a later date, but for now we are looking strictly at emergency measures that need to be taken with respect to children, youth and adults with disabilities currently in the education system, as well as those younger than school age, and those who have moved on from the K-12 system as adults.

The three most urgent issues are these:

Critical home and nursing care
Mental health and trauma
Family violence

A non-exhaustive list of the items we see a need for include:

- A communication plan that includes information accessible in ASL, for screen readers, in plain language with images to illustrate key concepts, and closed captioning to be used in public broadcasts and any videos shared. Information is vitally needed with regard to guidance around different health conditions and disabilities and the impact of COVID-19
- A financial plan that includes increases to people with disabilities and welfare payments, extending autism funding beyond birth month for those who will otherwise not be able to use all of their funding in time and will lose it, and advocacy to increase the federal disability tax benefit
- A health and supports plan that includes prioritizing home care and supports, as would be provided typically at school and/or in the community, and rapid scaleup of health care workers to understand how to care for people with disabilities
- A mental health care plan that includes supports for individuals with disabilities and also for their caregivers. Including counselling services in the Medical Services Plan, providing a dedicated hotline for people with disabilities - adults and children and youth, as well as for families, and guidelines for service providers who will be providing care in the homes of people with disabilities
- A plan to provide supports and qualified care around family violence
- Groceries, prescriptions and other supplies to be prioritized deliveries for people with disabilities and families with children and youth with disabilities at home - currently those who need it most are not able to access because stock is depleted by in person shopping, even if they did have the financial resources to feed themselves and their families. As we all know, many do not have those resources.
- A plan to address the issues of lack of and unstable housing, congregated settings and precarious employment for people with disabilities.

- Caregiver supports - paid time off to care for children and youth and adults with disabilities
- A plan for workers currently supporting adults or children and youth with disabilities, and continuity of service should they become ill. We can pull in students currently in training from ECE, EA and social work programs. We need to provide additional training in infection control to workers, along with information about trauma and other mental health concerns, as well as cross training in physical and emotional support needs.
- A financial and safety plan for those workers - continued pay for specialist services while school is out, priority access to personal protective equipment,

It would be helpful for our families if information on how to connect in community for local support and exchange of goods and services was compiled and distributed. We will also need to have a separate conversation about educational supports during this time, and a further conversation about supports that will be needed when attempting to transition back to whatever the new 'normal' looks like down the road. This will be challenging for everyone but more so for some disabled children, youth and adults.

Here are just two of the many anxious comments by parents and guardians in our community:

Just managing the changes of spring break is enough of a challenge in our household. I don't know how we'll handle additional weeks off, especially without regular activities. School provides not only education and social training, but respite for us. My eldest is already responding explosively and we're having to isolate his younger brothers for safety - the idea of us all being stuck together for a month without respite or support is quite frightening.

I would really like to know the risk of complications for those of us with kids with underlying medical conditions.

Such as Epilepsy, Chromosome Abnormalities, and compromised immune system from cleft lip and palate.

Home care and supports will be needed for both children and older youth and adults with a disability, regardless of whether the parent/guardian is at work or at home. Caregiver burnout, mental health strain and domestic abuse as a result of the isolation and stress, can be avoided with additional support. It will take the rapid coordination of all the Ministries working with organizations like SelfAdvocacy.net, Inclusion BC, the Family Support Institute, and more to create a coordinated plan for children, youth and adults with disabilities and their caregivers.

As always we appreciate your willingness to accept input and again we want to acknowledge the unprecedented nature of our current situation and the hard work and swift decision-making going into the management of this global crisis. We are offering our time and support to help in any way we can.

Regards,

Tracy Humphreys
Chair, BCEdAccess Society

About the BCEdAccess Society:

BCEdAccess champions and supports children and youth who have disabilities and who are complex learners to reach their full potential in BC education, and in all aspects of their lives. This is achieved through supporting families, sharing information, providing education to families, allies, professionals and students, providing community engagement and awareness, and other activities to promote equitable access to education and inclusion for all.