

**Ministry of
Social Development
and Poverty Reduction**

**2018/19 – 2020/21
SERVICE PLAN**

February 2018



For more information on the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction see Ministry
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Minister Accountability Statement



As the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, I am pleased to introduce the 2018/19-2020/21 Service Plan. The work this ministry does makes life better for people.

Since forming government, we've made progress by making several impactful changes. Income assistance and disability support rates have increased by \$100 per month. Earnings exemptions also increased, supporting people to build a more prosperous future. And, we created a transportation supplement so that people can participate in social activities to stay connected with their communities.

Over the next year we will develop B.C.'s first Poverty Reduction Strategy with targets and timelines, conduct a review of the existing income support systems through a basic income lens and design a Homelessness Action Plan that will reduce the homeless population through permanent housing and services. These plans will be built in partnership with the people we seek to serve, and will increase opportunity and make life better for people in our province.

This is a pivotal moment for the province. Reducing poverty will not be simple, but I am heartened by the energy and excitement that ministry staff members bring to their work every day. With their help, and the support of other ministries, as well as partners in business, labour, faith communities, advocates and persons with lived experience, we will build a bold and prosperous future for the people of B.C.

The *Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction 2018/19 - 2020/21 Service Plan* was prepared under my direction in accordance with the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*. I am accountable for the basis on which the plan has been prepared.

Minister's Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shane Simpson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Honourable Shane Simpson
Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
February 6, 2018

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Purpose of the Ministry

The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (SDPR) focuses on providing British Columbians in need with services that they count on. The fundamental purpose of the ministry is to tackle poverty and inequality, to deliver quality services that meet people's needs, and to ensure people from every background have the opportunity to reach their full potential. The mandate of the ministry includes developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy and our challenge is to create a plan that helps break the cycle of poverty.

The ministry's governing legislation includes the [Employment and Assistance Act](#), the [Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act](#), and the [Community Living Authority Act](#). The Minister is responsible for Community Living BC (CLBC) and supports the Parliamentary Secretary for Poverty Reduction. The ministry's key responsibilities include:

- Designing and implementing a province-wide poverty-reduction strategy;
- Providing income and disability assistance to those in need;
- Supporting community living services that help adults with developmental disabilities and their families develop connections and inclusion with their community; and
- Delivering employment programs and services to unemployed and underemployed individuals.

Further details about the ministry can be found at the [Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction](#) home page.

Strategic Direction and Alignment with Government Priorities

The Premier's July 18, 2017 [Mandate Letter](#) to the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction charges the Minister with achieving a number of key priorities. The Ministry has already addressed a number of these – taking first steps to make life more affordable for British Columbians living in poverty by raising income and disability assistance support rates by \$100 per month, making annual bus passes available to people on disability assistance through a new transportation supplement and, increasing earning exemptions by \$200 per month or \$2,400 annually for individuals on disability assistance using the annualized earnings exemption.

As critical next steps the Ministry will lead the development, design and implementation of a province-wide Poverty Reduction Strategy, review existing income support systems in B.C. through a basic income lens, and work in partnership to develop a Homelessness Action Plan.

The ministry is aligned with Government’s key priorities.

Government Priorities	The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction Aligns with These Priorities By:
Making life more affordable	Goal 1: Support better lives and increase social inclusion for British Columbians who live in poverty.
Delivering the services people count on	Goal 2: British Columbians in need receive assistance they can count on. Goal 3: British Columbians with disabilities achieve meaningful independence and inclusion in their communities.
A strong, sustainable economy	Goal 4: British Columbians in need are supported to participate in the economy and reach their full potential through employment.

Strategic Context

With 678,000 British Columbians living in poverty according to the Market Basket Measure¹ B.C. has the highest poverty rate in the country.² This number includes 118,000 children in low-income families and about 64,000 seniors. Approximately 40% of people living in poverty are low-income, working adults. Single mothers as well as people who are Indigenous or have a disability are twice as likely to live in poverty.

The ministry is responsible to develop a provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy, including timelines, measures and targets. Input from British Columbians, including poverty advocates, people with lived experience, Indigenous people, academics and experts, representatives of the labour and business communities and others will be crucial in order to understand what poverty looks like in communities throughout the province, and how to best take action to break the cycle of poverty.

The ministry is committed to providing high quality, consistent income assistance services that are responsive to diverse needs and that people can count on no matter where or how they are delivered. Temporary income assistance is available for those who are able to work but who need support when employment and other sources of income are not enough to support basic needs. The ministry provides disability assistance for those who, through disability or other barriers, have a more difficult time working or who cannot work. Supplemental assistance is available to support eligible medical and other needs.

The public can access these services through traditional channels such as by phone, face-to-face, email, online and fax, and more recently through additional self-serve options. The diverse geography of the province and the diverse needs of the people we serve continue to guide the ministry’s service

¹ The Market Basket Measures (MBM) sets out the disposable income threshold required for a family of four to be able to purchase a basket of goods and services representing a modest, basic standard of living. This includes, for example, the costs of food, clothing, footwear, transportation, shelter and other basic expenses. The MBM is calculated for Vancouver, as well as four other community profiles in British Columbia: rural; population under 30,000; population from 30,000 – 99,999; and population from 100,000 to 499,999.

² Statistics Canada provincial and national [poverty statistics](#).

delivery strategy. The ministry engages with clients and stakeholders to shape ongoing improvements and support the ministry's development and integration of both new and traditional modes of service delivery.

The Employment Program of British Columbia (EPBC) provides employment services, training and education, and other programs that support British Columbians to prepare for and transition into the labour market. The ministry is continuing its preparation towards the renewal of the EPBC contracts in 2019, when current contracts expire. The ministry is finalizing negotiation with the federal government on the renewal of federal labour market transfer agreements including the Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA). A new LMDA, providing additional funding for labour market programs and services for British Columbians is expected to be signed by March 2018.

The ministry continues to support CLBC in the development of initiatives and partnerships aimed at increasing community inclusion, accessibility and employment opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities. Engagement with families, advocates, service providers and their representatives is crucial to understanding service delivery issues and identifying responsive and sustainable service solutions.

Demographics and Economy

British Columbia's population aged 19 to 64 is expected to increase by 89,000 (2.9 percent) by 2020. The number of potential BC Employment and Assistance clients increases as the population increases. At the same time, the population is getting older. The population aged 19 to 24 is projected to decline by 6.9 percent while the population between the ages of 55 to 64 is projected to increase by 5.7 percent. People are more likely to develop a disability as they age and people with disabilities are living longer.

The Economic Forecast Council (EFC) expects B.C.'s real GDP to grow by 2.5 per cent in 2018 and 2.2 per cent in 2019. Meanwhile for Canada, the EFC projects national real GDP growth of 2.2 per cent in 2018 and 1.8 per cent in 2019. As such, B.C.'s economic growth is expected to outperform Canada's in the coming years. Downside risks to B.C.'s economic outlook include US trade policy uncertainty and ongoing economic challenges in Asia and Europe.

BC Employment and Assistance (BCEA) program caseloads are affected by demographic and economic factors. The temporary assistance caseload, made up of individuals who are unemployed or underemployed, had been trending upward until mid-2017 when it began to decline slightly as a result of a stronger labour market. The disability assistance caseload, made up of individuals who have a disability designation, has continued to grow as the result of longer life expectancies and an aging population.

Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Performance Measures

Goal 1: Support better lives and increase social inclusion for British Columbians who live in poverty.

Objective 1.1: Develop a strategy to reduce poverty in British Columbia.

Key Strategies:

- Complete the Poverty Reduction Strategy engagement process;
- Support the Minister’s Advisory Forum on Poverty Reduction;
- Review existing income support systems in B.C. through a basic income lens;
- Work in partnership with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and stakeholders to create a Homelessness Action Plan and conduct a province-wide homelessness count; and
- Develop a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy including timelines, measures and targets.

Performance measures, targets, and how they link to objectives will be developed after the [Poverty Reduction Strategy engagement process](#) is complete in the March 2018 and as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Goal 2: British Columbians in need receive assistance they can count on.

Objective 2.1: Income and disability assistance is available for eligible British Columbians to assist with support and shelter costs.

Key Strategies:

- Provide clients with compassionate and efficient access to assistance.
- Assist clients to access all of the potential income sources available to them including federal benefits.
- Ensure administrative fairness through the provision of an effective and efficient reconsideration and appeal system.

Performance Measure(s)	2016/17 Actual	2017/18 Forecast	2018/19 Target	2019/20 Target	2020/21 Target
2.1a Number of clients registering for My Self-Serve ³	35,800	40,000	60,000	65,000	70,000

³ Service Delivery Division, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

Linking Performance Measures to Objectives:

2.1a My Self-Serve (MYSS), the ministry’s online service portal, was implemented provincially in the fall of 2014 to provide more flexible and efficient access to income assistance services. An increase in the number of clients who use MYSS indicates that more people are taking advantage of one of the ministry’s most efficient service channels.

Discussion:

Clients can use MYSS to access their file information 24/7, apply for income assistance, submit their monthly report, upload documents from a mobile phone or computer, communicate with ministry employees and print confirmation of assistance. MYSS modernizes ministry services by offering more flexibility in how, when and where clients access service and by increasing convenience, self-sufficiency, and independence. The ministry is integrating technology into its service delivery model, leading the way for government to provide modern, convenient, reliable and secure services. In February 2017, the previous income assistance application process was integrated into MYSS. This allowed applicants for income assistance to register for MYSS as part of the application process which in turn has positively impacted registrations and led the ministry to increase future targets. Other service avenues are also available for those who need an alternative to MYSS.

Objective 2.2: Supplementary supports are available to meet the changing and individual needs of eligible British Columbians.

Key Strategies:

- Provide eligible clients with supplemental assistance such as transportation supplements or bus passes, dental and optical assistance.
- Provide eligible low income seniors with the Seniors’ Supplement.
- Provide children from eligible low and moderate income families assistance with dental, optical and hearing aid needs through the Healthy Kids Program.
- Ensure administrative fairness through the provision of an effective and efficient reconsideration and appeal system.

Performance Measure(s)	Baseline	2016/17 Actual	2017/18 Forecast	2018/19 Target	2019/20 Target	2020/21 Target
2.2a Percentage of ministry reconsideration decisions confirmed on appeal ⁴	90%	92%	92%	90%	90%	90%

⁴ Source for *Baseline* is the average of percentages reported in the Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal Annual Reports 2011/12-2015/16. Source for *Actual* is the Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal’s CITAR tracking system.

Linking Performance Measures to Objectives:

2.2a The percentage of ministry reconsideration decisions confirmed on appeal by the Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal (EAAT) tracks how well the ministry is performing in providing the assistance and supports for which clients are eligible. Clients who disagree with an initial ministry decision may request that the ministry reconsider. If a client disagrees with a reconsideration decision, they may appeal that decision to the Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal (EAAT) which may confirm or overturn the decision.

Discussion:

The reconsideration and appeal process, and therefore Measure 2.2a, applies to decisions with respect to services referenced under both Objective 2.1 and Objective 2.2.

Goal 3: British Columbians with disabilities achieve meaningful independence and inclusion in their communities.

Objective 3.1: Support a comprehensive and integrated system of supports and services for persons with disabilities.

Key Strategies:

- Provide adults with disabilities access to responsive services that support them in participating as full citizens and in achieving improved outcomes.
- Work collaboratively with other ministries and local, regional and provincial partners to continue the integration and alignment of innovative and inclusive disability supports and services to improve outcomes for persons with disabilities and their families.
- Work with government and community partners to support CLBC-eligible youth transition to adulthood.
- Monitor and support the transition process for youth with special needs who are entering adulthood to ensure they access the ministry’s disability assistance program and the adult community living services offered through Community Living BC.
- Continue to work with citizens with disabilities and their families, community organizations and the business community to develop solutions and strategies that improve the lives of British Columbians with disabilities and their families.
- Engage stakeholders and the public to identify barriers and solutions to improving employment outcomes for Persons with Disabilities.

Performance Measure(s)	2016/17 Actual	2017/18 Forecast	2018/19 Target	2019/20 Target	2020/21 Target
3.1a Total amount of exempted earnings received by Persons with Disabilities cases. ⁵	\$100 million	\$117 million	\$120 million	\$125 million	\$129 million

⁵ Data Source: Research Branch, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

Linking Performance Measures to Objectives:

3.1a Employment provides meaningful participation and inclusion as well as the ability for the ministry’s Persons with Disabilities clients to take advantage of earnings exemptions and increase their total income. An increase in the total amount of exempted earnings reported by these clients is an indicator that both participation in employment and incomes have improved.

Discussion:

The Employment Program of British Columbia and Technology@Work provide a range of specialized services that: help individuals with disabilities participate in their communities; pursue employment goals as they are able; increase their self-reliance; and, build skills and experience that may lead to further employment. The ministry also provides other support for Persons with Disabilities to work, including earnings exemptions.

In January 2015, the ministry replaced monthly earnings exemptions with the Annual Earnings Exemption (AEE) for all ministry clients receiving disability assistance. The AEE is a more flexible way of calculating earnings exemptions that allows a client’s monthly earnings to exceed the former monthly earnings exemption up to a cumulative annual total amount. The AEE helps individuals receiving disability assistance who are able to work to take advantage of employment opportunities and to keep more of their earnings. In September 2017, the ministry increased earnings exemptions by \$2,400 annually for single individuals receiving disability assistance. Measure 3.1a as forecasted for 2017/18 is higher than was targeted in last year’s Service Plan, and future targets are higher because of the increased earnings exemptions and AEE.

Goal 4: British Columbians in need are supported to participate in the economy and reach their full potential through employment.

Objective 4.1: Enhance the resilience of families in B.C. to achieve better lives and increasingly positive economic outcomes.

Key Strategies:

- Ensure ministry programs provide supports when necessary while also supporting transitions into the workforce.
- Work with other government ministries to provide people on income assistance with targeted services and supports that secure employment and a better life.
- Consider individual client needs in delivering employment programs and services.
- Continue to work with ministry partners to support social innovation and its potential to advance poverty reduction and inclusive economic growth.

SDPR provides temporary assistance to people who can work but who have a temporary need for support. Performance measures 4.1a and 4.1b relate to these clients, who also participate in activities aimed at helping them to transition into the work-force.

Performance Measure(s)	2016/17 Estimate	2017/18 Forecast	2018/19 Target	2019/20 Target	2020/21 Target
4.1a Percentage of the B.C. population aged 19-64 who can work but need temporary assistance ⁶	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%
4.1b Median number of months clients who can work are in need of temporary assistance. ⁷	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0

⁶ Research Branch, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. Note BC Stats regularly revises their population numbers including past population numbers. For consistency and accuracy, this measure is always reported using the most current population data. As a result, there may be changes in the measure from one plan to another due solely to changes in BC Stats population estimates.

⁷ Research Branch, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. Since median durations measure the number of months it takes for half of a cohort of people who can work to no longer need assistance, the measure looks forward in time. The reporting lag means the actual figure for 2016/17 is not available at the time of writing and therefore an estimate is provided.

Linking Performance Measures to Objectives:

4.1a Performance measure 4.1a tracks the percentage of the B.C. working age population who can work but need temporary assistance. A decline in the measure is an indicator that fewer British Columbians who can work have a temporary need for assistance.

4.1b Performance measure 4.1b reflects the number of months it takes for half a cohort of clients who can work to no longer have a need for temporary assistance. Longer durations are an indicator that new clients who can work are having difficulty transitioning into employment.

Discussion:

The number of clients who can work but need temporary assistance is sensitive to the state of the labour market. Although a stronger labour market is resulting in fewer people who can work needing assistance, the decline is not expected to be large enough to change Measure 4.1a in the next few years.

The median time that a client who can work needs assistance (Measure 4.1b) was higher than forecasted in 2016/17, and is once again forecasted to be higher than what was targeted in the 2017/18 Service Plan (7.5 months). The increases are occurring despite a growing economy. This is likely the result of a mismatch between the types of jobs being created and the skills of income assistance clients. Of the five industries with the highest employment growth over the last three years, only construction and retail are major sources of employment for income assistance clients. Other industries that traditionally hire many income assistance clients, including accommodation and food services, transportation and warehousing, and business and building supports have experienced moderate growth. Future targets for Measure 4.1b have been adjusted upward to reflect the current labour market.

Objective 4.2: Employment Program of BC clients achieve employment.

Key Strategies:

- Reduce barriers and provide employment services and supports to British Columbians looking to reach their full potential through employment.
- Work collaboratively with partner ministries to ensure ministry employment programs and supports are aligned with the needs of individuals and the labour market.
- Continue to engage with communities and employers to ensure that the program is responsive to local labor market needs.

Performance Measure(s)	2016/17 Actual	2017/18 Forecast	2018/19 Target	2019/20 Target	2020/21 Target
4.2a Percentage of Employment Program of BC case-managed clients who achieve employment. ⁸	55%	53%	55%	55%	60%

⁸ Data Source: Employment and Labour Market Services Division, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. Employment is defined as when a client attains a full-time job (30 or more hours/week) or a part-time job (when part-time employment is desired; less than 30 hours/week), or self-employment (business is implemented and considered operational), after the client has completed all EPBC services.

Linking Performance Measures to Objectives:

4.2a Performance measure 3.2a captures the percentage of case-managed EPBC clients who achieved employment.

Discussion:

Enhancements to program practices in recent years have continued to have a positive impact on the number of clients achieving employment. Notwithstanding this and a stronger labour market, the ministry is maintaining its targets at 55 per cent for 2018/19 and 2019/20, during which time the procurement cycle and renewal of contracts for WorkBC Employment Services Centres will happen. Once this transition is complete, it is anticipated that the growth in this measure will resume in 2020/21, which is reflected in the higher outcome target for that year.

Resource Summary

Core Business Area*	2017/18 Restated Estimates ⁹	2018/19 Estimates	2019/20 Plan	2020/21 Plan
Operating Expenses (\$000)				
Income Assistance	2,123,527	2,318,986	2,366,885	2,388,785
Employment	29,014	29,029	29,038	29,038
Community Living Services	940,619	1,001,261	1,031,504	1,051,504
Employment and Assistance Appeal tribunal	1,797	1,800	1,805	1,805
Executive and Support Services	10,503	12,651	12,793	10,793
Total	3,105,460	3,363,727	3,442,025	3,481,925
Ministry Capital Expenditures (Consolidated Revenue Fund) (\$000)				
Executive and Support Services	4,228	1,549	5,877	549
Total	4,228	1,549	5,877	549

⁹ For comparative purposes, amounts shown for 2017/18 have been restated to be consistent with the presentation of the 2018/19 Estimates.

* Further information on program funding and vote recoveries is available in the [Estimates and Supplement to the Estimates](#).

Appendix A: Ministry Contact Information

Employment and Income Assistance

The ministry has 48 Employment and Income Assistance offices and 35 partnerships with Service BC locations throughout British Columbia. To find the office that provides services for a specific community, go to <http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/contacts/offices.html>, or contact the ministry toll free by telephone from anywhere in the province at 1 866 866-0800.

Service BC refers members of the public to the appropriate ministry office and transfers calls and forwards e-mails free of charge. Hours of operation for Service BC are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding statutory holidays.

- In Victoria, call: 250 387-6121
- In the Lower Mainland, call: 604 660-2421
- Elsewhere in British Columbia call: 1 800 663-7867
- Outside British Columbia call: 1 604 660-2421
- E-mail address: ServiceBC@gov.bc.ca
- Telephone device for the deaf and hearing impaired (TDD):
 - In the Lower Mainland, call: 604 775-0303
 - Elsewhere in British Columbia, call: 1 800 661-8773

Employment and Labour Market Services

The Employment Program of BC makes it easier for people to find work through a wide range of integrated employment services and supports. For more information on services and supports provided for a specific community, go to: WorkBC Official Website – [WorkBC Centres](#).