

April 20, 2021

BACKGROUND

Supporting people through the pandemic and after

British Columbians are working hard to fight the virus and get life back on track. Government is here, working with British Columbians. To support people through the pandemic and help ensure people don't fall further behind as B.C. moves toward recovery, Budget 2021 includes supports and services to make B.C. more affordable for everyone.

Creating an affordable B.C. for everyone

Free public transportation for children 12 and under

Over 340,000 children, 12 and under, around the province will be able to ride public transportation for free in time for classes this September. Government is investing \$26 million, including \$15 million from the Federal-Provincial Restart Agreement, to help families get around more affordably. Families in the TransLink service area will save up to \$672 a year for each child that uses a monthly pass, while families in communities served by BC Transit could save up to \$400 a year.

Supporting B.C.'s youth through education investments

The pandemic has been especially hard on B.C.'s youth, teachers and support staff. Budget 2021 continues to make investments in B.C.'s education system to improve access to mental health supports in schools and develop a framework to address racism and reconciliation so that the next generation can continue to develop with the safety and support they need to thrive. Budget 2021 invests \$1.2 billion in operating funding over the fiscal plan to support the growing number of students in B.C.'s K-12 system and to support wage increases negotiated under the Sustainable Services Negotiating Mandate for teachers and support staff. Budget 2021 also includes \$3.5 billion in capital investments over the fiscal plan to expand, replace, maintain or renovate schools in communities across the province.

Building more affordable housing in communities throughout B.C.

More than 26,000 new homes have been built or are underway since government launched its 10-year Homes for B.C. plan in 2018. Budget 2021 continues to support this key priority by creating more affordable housing options for growing families, seniors, women and children leaving violence, students and Indigenous peoples. This includes an additional \$2 billion in development financing through the HousingHub program to work with partners to facilitate the creation of approximately 9,000 new homes for middle income families over the next three to five years.

Affordable child care for British Columbians

Over 35,000 B.C. families now have access to low-cost child care through historic investments over the last four years. Budget 2021 continues government's plan to make quality and affordable child care available for all families, including more than doubling the number of \$10-a-day child care spaces through the Childcare BC Universal Prototype Sites, while improving wages for workers and adding thousands of new spaces.

BC Recovery Benefit

The BC Recovery Benefit has helped approximately 2.5 million British Columbians with more than \$1.2 billion to date, while stimulating local economies. The benefit provides a one-time, tax-free payment of up to \$1,000 for eligible families and single parents, and up to \$500 for eligible individuals. Budget 2021 includes \$100 million to continue to fund the BC Recovery Benefit. People can apply until June 30, 2021.

Keeping British Columbians healthy

Healthy families are essential to a healthy economy and a healthy future, and Budget 2021 continues to protect British Columbian families from COVID-19 and expand the health and mental health services people rely on to stay healthy and safe.

Supporting B.C.'s vulnerable people

For many people who already faced systemic barriers or oppression, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have magnified existing inequalities. The risk of long-term economic insecurity is further amplified for Indigenous women, people of colour, women with disabilities, non-binary people and people in the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Budget 2021 includes programs and funding directed to people experiencing inequality to help remove and break down barriers that prevent access to supports so people can get the help they need, when it's needed.

Income and Disability Assistance

For people facing financial barriers, Budget 2021 includes the largest-ever permanent increase to income and disability assistance in B.C. The \$175-a-month increase builds on two previous increases totaling \$150 since 2017, for a total increase to assistance rates of \$325 a month. These three increases were the first in B.C. in over 10 years. Budget 2021 also provides a \$50 increase to the seniors' supplement—the first increase since it was established in 1987 and will help 80,000 low-income seniors.

Child Opportunity Benefit

Effective October 2020, nearly 300,000 families began to receive the Child Opportunity Benefit, which will continue until the child turns 18, whereas previous benefits stopped at age six. Families with one child receive up to \$1,600 per year, up to \$2,600 for two children, and up to \$3,400 for three children. In total, families in B.C. will receive \$410 million through the Child Opportunity Benefit this year.

Supports for people experiencing homelessness

At a time when British Columbians were asked to stay home, wash their hands and stay safe, people experiencing homelessness were at particular risk. B.C. responded quickly by expanding shelter options, including securing more than 3,000 temporary spaces through leases of hotel rooms and emergency shelters with services to help keep people safe. Budget 2021 includes:

- An additional \$265 million in 2021-22 to extend supports and services for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to maintain 3,000 temporary emergency shelter and hotel spaces that supported people facing homelessness with a safe place to go during the pandemic.
- Opening more permanent supportive housing in partnership with the federal government as part of the Rapid Housing Initiative.

These emergency measures are an important step in supporting people experiencing homelessness now, and government will continue to work with community partners to deliver a co-ordinated response to homelessness based on prevention, more permanent housing options, and support services to continue improving people's outcomes.

Building a more equitable future for B.C.

Budget 2021 goes further to support people who need it most, including Indigenous communities, people with disabilities, women and youth, by providing:

- \$85 million over the fiscal plan to support family, children and youth services, including additional funding to support children in care, and providing children with a disability more funding for medical equipment and services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- \$367 million in new funding for Community Living BC over three years to provide supports and services to over 24,000 adults with developmental disabilities and their families.
- \$132 million over three years for a justice system that serves all British Columbians and provides timely and equitable access to justice particularly for women, visible minorities, single parents, refugees, Indigenous peoples, 2SLGBTQ+ community members and people with low incomes.
- \$45 million over the fiscal plan for First Nations cultural safety and humility training and Indigenous liaisons in every regional health authority to help address systemic Indigenous racism in the health-care system through training and education.
- \$20 million over the fiscal plan to add 400 more spaces to the Aboriginal Head Start program that provides no-fee, culturally relevant care for Indigenous families.
- \$17 million to partner with hundreds of Indigenous communities and organizations to expand access to programs through the Indigenous Skills Training program.

- Tourism investments, to support the recovery of a sector in which groups that have been disproportionately affected represent a significant part of the workforce.

Government remains committed to fighting against racism and making B.C. more welcoming and inclusive for everyone. The Province is continuing to tackle racism through the reinstatement of the B.C. Human Rights Commission, stronger anti-racism supports for schools and the development of a new anti-racism act and legislation on race-based data collection.

Budget 2021 makes significant new investments to advance child care, make life more affordable, reduce poverty, advance meaningful reconciliation and invest in the services people rely on to build a future recovery for British Columbia that includes everyone.

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