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BACKGROUND

Strengthening health care and the services people rely on

A stronger B.C. for everyone means delivering the services people rely on and supporting a growing population. Budget 2024 provides \$8 billion over three years to strengthen health care, kindergarten-to-Grade 12 education, justice and public safety, and help for people who need care and support.

Health care

With the population growing and aging, and a large segment of doctors and nurses retiring in the next decade, more people are needed to fill those jobs and help meet the demands of the health-care system. Budget 2024 provides more than \$2 billion to support people's access to the full range of health services, including primary and acute care, long-term care, assisted living, home care, and mental-health and substance-use care, and recruitment and retention of health-care professionals.

Capital investments of \$13 billion over the next three years will support the construction of long-term care, acute care and cancer care facilities.

Cancer care

Demand for cancer treatment has increased and B.C.'s 10-Year Cancer Action Plan is ensuring more patients get the treatments they need. To build on this, Budget 2024 invests \$270 million to deliver treatments and strengthen prevention and screening services, such as HPV vaccines and cervical and hereditary cancer screenings. Cancer care centres are also on the way for Surrey, Burnaby, Nanaimo and Kamloops to provide better care closer to home.

Home and community care services for seniors

To support seniors' quality of life and enable them to live in their own homes longer, Budget 2024 provides \$354 million to ensure that seniors can continue to access the services they count on, even as demand increases, through:

- \$227 million for home health-care services to help with daily activities such as bathing, grooming, lifts and transfers, and nutrition; These services would be provided by regulated professionals including nurses, occupational and physical therapists, and social workers.
- \$127 million for community-based services, such as Better at Home, which supports seniors with day-to-day tasks like grocery shopping, light housekeeping, minor home repairs, snow shovelling, and transportation to and from medical appointments.

In-vitro fertilization

- No one should be denied the opportunity to have a child because of how much money they make, who they love, and whether they have a partner. However, many people can't conceive without help. Starting in April 2025, B.C. will launch a new publicly funded in-vitro fertilization program, funding both treatment and medication for a single cycle. A total of \$68 million is allocated in Budget 2024.

Mental health and addictions

From climate emergencies to the COVID-19 pandemic and the toxic-drug crisis, people have been through a lot in recent years, and that has increased demand for mental-health programs and services. Budget 2024 continues to build on the Province's work to expand services and break the stigma that prevents people from calling for help:

- \$117 million to continue funding more than 2,200 community mental-health and substance-use treatment beds at more than 300 health authority and community care facilities;
- \$49 million to support existing harm-reduction initiatives at 49 overdose-prevention sites, drug checking, and naloxone kit distribution;
- \$39 million to fund existing Peer-Assisted Care Teams and Mobile Integrated Crisis Response Teams; and
- \$10 million to support the development and implementation of treatment and recovery programs.

Through the Province's capital plan, additional funding will support treatment and recovery beds, including work to expand the Red Fish Healing model.

K-12 education

Schools saw historic enrolment growth in 2023, with 13,000 more students. Budget 2024 invests \$968 million for more staff in classrooms to support this growth. Through this funding, students will also be better supported with \$255 million for the Classroom Enhancement Fund to hire more teachers, including special education teachers, teacher psychologists, and councillors.

A record \$4.2 billion is dedicated to build, renovate, and seismically upgrade schools and playgrounds over the next three years as part of the Province's capital plan.

Justice and public safety

Budget 2024 invests \$398 million to help keep people safe and communities strong. New investments will better support families with access to the justice system by expanding the early resolution model and legal aid services. The early resolution model helps divert family law cases to mediation to improve timely resolution and also helps reduce the amount of family law cases that proceed to court. Funding for legal aid services will help establish a new family law clinic dedicated to families experiencing family violence and expand access to legal aid services to help serve thousands more families each year.

Additional funding will also support a variety of important public safety programs, such as correction centres, the BC Coroners Service, and RoadSafetyBC programs.

Help for people who need care and support

Budget 2024 protects and strengthens supports for children and youth in care or with support needs. This includes \$114 million for children in alternative care arrangements and will improve front-line support in the child welfare system with new staff, including roots workers, who support Indigenous children and youth.

New funding of \$30 million over three years will better support children with dyslexia and related learning differences in the K-12 school system. It will support early literacy screening for kindergarten to Grade 3 students, better equip teachers and support staff with professional development, and provide additional intervention and outreach programs. Once the program is fully rolled out, it is expected approximately 9,000 students per year will benefit from the new supports.

New funding of \$26 million will support 2,800 more children and youth with an autism diagnosis or complex health needs, for a total of 28,000 children and youth in 2024-25. This funding will also help families access eligible services and supports that promote skills development as part of the Medical Benefits program.

An additional \$105 million to Community Living BC will improve the quality of life for people with developmental disabilities and their families, helping clients access services and support to manage daily activities.

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