

# Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

## 2024/25 – 2026/27 Service Plan

February 2024



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## Minister's Accountability Statement



The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction 2024/25 – 2026/27 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.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'SM', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Honourable Sheila Malcolmson  
Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction  
February 22, 2024

# Table of Contents

Minister's Accountability Statement .....	3
Strategic Direction.....	5
Purpose of the Ministry .....	5
Operating Environment.....	6
Performance Planning.....	8
Financial Summary.....	15
Appendix A: Public Sector Organizations .....	16

## Strategic Direction

In 2024/25, the Government of British Columbia will remain focused on providing the services and infrastructure that people depend on to build a good life. Government will continue delivering results that matter to British Columbians including helping people with costs, attainable and affordable housing, strengthened health care, safer communities, and a secure, clean and fair economy. Government will continue working collaboratively with Indigenous Peoples as it implements the Action Plan for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and delivers initiatives that advance reconciliation in ways that make a difference in communities throughout the province.

This 2024/25 service plan outlines how the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction will support the government's priorities and selected items identified in the [December 2022 Minister's Mandate Letter](#).

## Purpose of the Ministry

The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction ([SDPR](#)) focuses on reducing poverty, creating opportunities and increasing inclusion. The purpose of the ministry is to provide quality services for British Columbians in need, to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in their community and to reach their full potential.

SDPR is guided by five pieces of legislation: the [Accessible British Columbia Act](#), the [Employment and Assistance Act](#), the [Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act](#), the [Poverty Reduction Strategy Act](#) and the [Community Living Authority Act](#). The Minister is responsible for [Community Living BC](#) (CLBC) and is supported by the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development and Non-Profits and the Parliamentary Secretary for Accessibility. The ministry's key priorities include:

- Updating the [TogetherBC: BC's Poverty Reduction Strategy](#) by March 2024, to continue reducing the number of people, and in particular children, who are in poverty in B.C.;
- Leading work with the Ministry of Finance to continue addressing impacts on low-income people caused by cost-of-living increases related to global inflation;
- Continuing to lead work on food security and dignified access to food in partnerships with food producers, grocery stores, food banks, schools, and non-profits, with support from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food;
- Supporting the work of the Ministry of Housing to better coordinate services to deliver improved outcomes for people living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, in collaboration with the Ministries of Mental Health and Addictions, Health, and Public Safety and Solicitor General, as well as Indigenous Peoples, external partners and others;
- Ensuring the voices of people living with disabilities are heard in all policy development; and

- Continuing work to engage advocates, communities, and businesses to ensure the new *Accessible British Columbia Act* is well understood and effective at making B.C. more accessible and inclusive for everyone – including the implementation of accessible service delivery and employment accessibility standards.

Further to the above, two key priorities for the ministry (outside mandate letters) are:

- Leading collaborative engagement through the [Social Services Sector Roundtable](#) to help strengthen the important community social services that people count on every day; and
- Through [Community Living BC](#), continue working on the [Re-imagining Community Inclusion Initiative](#) and the [Re-imagining Community Inclusion Work Plan](#) to improve services for adults with developmental disabilities and their families.

## Operating Environment

The ministry continues to review and adjust its programs and supports to better serve people in BC who are challenged by:

- Barriers to employment;
- Poverty;
- Affordability and food security; and
- Accessibility.

The ministry provides income and disability assistance to an average of 235,000 people each month, including 124,000 people with the Persons with Disabilities designation and 48,000 dependent children. Caseloads are expected to increase over the next few years as the result of a slowing economy.

The ministry provided employment services through WorkBC to about 82,000 people in 2022/23, serving about 24% per cent more people than in the previous year. The demand for employment services has been increasing, primarily driven by an increase in the numbers of immigrants seeking services. SDPR remains committed to ensuring employment services provide supports to those facing more complex barriers to employment, to better serve those who are under-represented in the labour market.

In 2023, updated poverty related statistics became available for 2021. Although the government is still meeting its poverty reduction targets, the 2021 data showed that poverty worsened compared to 2020, as federal COVID-related government supports ended.<sup>1</sup> The number of British Columbians living in poverty in 2021 increased by 65,000 to 447,000 according to the Market Basket Measure (MBM).<sup>2</sup> This includes 70,000 children living in low-income families and 70,000 seniors. This dynamic has been a focal point for the ministry's work to renew the province's Poverty Reduction Strategy for March 2024. To date SDPR has heard

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/230502/dq230502a-eng.pdf?st=KaW3Hsy4>

<sup>2</sup> [Low income statistics by age, sex and economic family type \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

from over 10,000 people across the province, over 70% with lived experience of poverty, to continue to shape government programs and services that reduce poverty and remove barriers for those most in need of support.

The increase in the global inflation rate that started in 2022/23 has put great pressure on low- and middle-income British Columbians. Food and rent costs continue to rise at a much higher rate than the average for all goods and services. This has forced many more people to rely on food banks and crisis supplements. Interest rate increases to control inflation have created additional affordability problems for homeowners and other borrowers, and this is predicted to continue into at least 2024.

While high inflation rates worsen inequality and poverty, initiatives to help improve affordability across BC include: creating the [BC Affordability Credit](#), increasing the [BC Family Benefit](#) and [income assistance shelter rates](#), providing over \$50 million to support [food access programs](#), \$15 million for the [First Nations Wellbeing Fund](#), and \$60 million for the [Stronger Community Services Fund](#) to support non-profit organizations working on poverty and social inclusion.

## Demographics and Economy

The income assistance caseload is sensitive to demographics and the state of the labour market. In 2022/23 the income assistance caseload increased by 10.8% as the ending of federal COVID benefits resulted in more people requiring provincial assistance.

The disability assistance caseload, made up of people who have a disability designation, has continued to grow as the result of longer life expectancies and growing population. The disability assistance caseload increased by 2.1% in 2022/23 compared to 1.5% in the previous year, which was the lowest growth rate since 1988/89.

British Columbia's economic recovery continued in 2022/23. The number of people unemployed fell by 23%, decreasing the unemployment rate to 4.5% in 2022/23. A strong labour market was key to supporting employable clients to work. While the labour market has been strong in 2023, a slowing economy and rising unemployment could put pressure on both the caseload and poverty.

Despite the strong labour market, there are still people seeking employment supports. However, those seeking services have more significant barriers to employment. 76% of employment clients currently underrepresented in the labour market, including Immigrants, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, require additional time spent working with an employment counsellor and more intensive supports to prepare them for employment.

The ministry's work to continue to meet poverty reduction targets will be supported by its ongoing focus on providing accessible services and supports for people struggling with affordability, food security, risks of homelessness or homelessness, and removing barriers to employment for people underrepresented in the labour market.

## Performance Planning

### Goal 1: Reduce Poverty in British Columbia

The ministry is responsible for the [Poverty Reduction Strategy Act](#), which sets out legislated targets and actions to reduce poverty in British Columbia.

#### Objective 1.1: Implement the cross-government, province-wide Poverty-Reduction Strategy

As the lead on British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy, the ministry works across government to ensure that the requirements and targets as set out in the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* are achieved.

##### Key Strategies

- Update TogetherBC, the comprehensive, cross-government Poverty Reduction Strategy, by 2024 to continue to meet BC's poverty reduction targets and address other pressing issues such as the depth of poverty, the cycle of poverty, food security and inflation.
- Build on results from the broad public engagement that took place in 2023 with over 10,000 British Columbians, including 70% with lived or living experience of poverty, to inform an update to [TogetherBC](#). This includes ongoing engagement and co-development with Indigenous partners to meet the spirit and intent of the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#).
- Continue to lead government's work, in partnership with other ministries and external partners, to address food security for people in need and support a long-term, sustainable approach to food insecurity in BC.
- Review the BC Employment and Assistance legislation to improve access and outcomes and reduce barriers to community and labour market participation.
- Continue to support the multi-sectoral Period Poverty Task Force; the task force is to submit recommendations by March 2024.

##### Discussion

The ending of COVID supports, high inflation, and a slowing economy in 2023 and 2024 increase the need for the ministry to continue to work on poverty reduction. The current poverty reduction strategy must be reviewed and updated in 2024, including future targets. As part of the review, the ministry is working with other ministries, consulting with the Minister's Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee, and engaging people across British Columbia to learn their experiences with poverty. A broad public and targeted engagement to update the poverty reduction strategy was undertaken in 2023 with over 10,000 British Columbians, including over 70% with lived and living experience of poverty. The engagement findings are also informing a review of the legislative framework governing British Columbia's income and disability assistance program. This review intends to examine the barriers faced by recipients



of assistance, including from a GBA+ and reconciliation perspective. Consultation and partnership with Indigenous partners will be ongoing as the strategy is developed and implemented.

## Performance Measures

Performance Measures	2020 Actual	2021 Actuals	2022-2024 Target
[1a] Change in Total Poverty Rate from 2016 <sup>1</sup>	-52.5%	-45.0%	-25.0%
[1b] Change in Child Poverty Rate from 2016	-71.3%	-54.6%	-50.0%

Data source: Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0135-01 Low-income statistics by age, sex and economic family type.

<sup>1</sup>As a result of a delay in the reporting of poverty statistics and the time it takes for investments to impact poverty rates, there are no interim targets.

## Discussion

The *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* sets out legislated targets for the reduction of both the overall poverty rate (25%) and the poverty rate for children (50%) by 2024. The targets were set to be ambitious but also achievable and would result in significant improvements in the lives of low-income British Columbians.

The Province uses Statistics Canada’s Market Basket Measure (MBM)<sup>3</sup> as its official poverty measure. The MBM is also Canada’s official poverty measure. There is a two-year delay in producing the data since it relies on income tax data provided by the federal government.

## Goal 2: British Columbians in need have services, supports and opportunities that make life better

The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction focuses on providing a system of supports to British Columbians in need, to help them achieve their social and economic independence and secure a better future.

### Objective 2.1: Deliver reliable, responsive, consistent, accessible and secure income and disability assistance services

Delivering modern and consistent service with a focus on reliability, responsiveness and relationship-building remains a key priority. The ministry continues to expand and improve online and electronic self-service options, which increases accessibility of services for clients regardless of their location in British Columbia.

<sup>3</sup> [Low income statistics by age, sex and economic family type \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.commerce.gc.ca/low-income-statistics-by-age-sex-and-economic-family-type)

## Key Strategies

- Maintain community presence through expanded outreach by Community Integration Specialists, working collaboratively with community partners, and expanding the use of mobile service delivery options.
- Continue to promote and improve service options that support accessibility for clients during climate events such as wildfires and floods, including Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) payments, digital self-service, and telephone reporting options.
- Regularly monitor client feedback and satisfaction to help improve services.
- Ensure administrative fairness through the provision of an effective and efficient reconsideration and appeal system.

## Discussion

The ministry's income and disability assistance services are designed to help people build a solid connection with communities and the labour market. In turn, these services support people to secure their future, establish self-sufficiency in support of their families and help them contribute to their communities. By providing temporary help to those who can work and longer-term aid to those who have a more difficult time working, or who cannot work through disability or other barriers, the ministry ensures the needs of British Columbians are being addressed.

The ministry continues to adapt its service delivery approach to increase accessibility and to meet the diverse needs of clients. People can access in-person services at 84 physical locations, including 36 ministry offices and 48 Service BC offices around the province. Telephone-based services give clients automated telephone reporting options as well as direct live support from a ministry worker. For those who prefer to access ministry services through self-service options, the ministry continues to enhance the My Self-Serve portal and the self serve options through the toll-free number. Also, the option for Electronic Fund Transfer payments provides opportunity for clients to continue to receive the support they need during extreme weather events and wildfires.

Community Integration Services provide in-person outreach and in-reach services to people who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, connecting them with financial assistance and community supports. This includes partnerships with community organizations including Friendship Centers throughout the Province to provide support to people outside of a traditional government office setting and expanding the number of vehicles outfitted with the equipment and technology needed to deliver mobile services.

## **Objective 2.2: Job seekers have access to high quality services and supports they need to find and keep meaningful employment**

High quality employment services and supports are needed, so B.C. is ready to meet the future demands of a skilled workforce and fill millions<sup>4</sup> of jobs over the next decade. These services

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<sup>4</sup> [British Columbia Labour Market Outlook 2021-2023 Outlook](#)

support Indigenous people, women, people of colour, people with disabilities and other underrepresented people participate in the labour market and help fill labour market needs.

### Key Strategies

- Work with our service delivery partners to provide a high-quality, responsive, and consistent service experience to the people and communities in B.C.
- Increase equity of opportunities by offering low barrier employment services to people facing complex barriers to employment.
- Adapt programs and services to respond to the changing labour market environment and in anticipation of future labour market needs.
- Lead the coordination and collaboration with community-led organizations, businesses, and employers to create equitable opportunities for participation in B.C.'s economy.

### Discussion

This objective aims to meet the future needs of a shifting labour market and ensure everyone in British Columbia has the opportunity to benefit from the job openings and expected strong labour demand. The ministry will focus on providing high quality services to job seekers in British Columbia, supporting an inclusive labour market and meeting the increasing demand for skilled workers.

### Performance Measures

Performance Measure	2022/23 Baseline	2023/24 Forecast	2024/25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target
[2a] Percent of clients using My Self-Serve	54%	55%	58%	60%	55%
[2b] Percent of clients receiving payments via Electronic Fund Transfer	85%	85%	85%	85%	85%
[2c] Percent of callers that reported the ministry worker was respectful (via a voluntary phone survey)	85%	85%	85%	85%	85%

Data source: Client Phone Survey collected by the Service Delivery Division, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

### Discussion

The ministry promotes the use of My Self Serve<sup>5</sup> as a convenient, online option for people in British Columbia to access income and disability assistance. Continued promotion of this

<sup>5</sup> My Self Serve (MySS) provides online access to income and disability assistance for residents of British Columbia

option is expected to result in a steady state of client usage. The percentage of clients receiving payments via Electronic Fund Transfer is a new measure, reflecting that this payment option offers greater accessibility to clients, especially during extreme weather and wildfire events. The ministry receives feedback via survey from people who chose to access ministry services via telephone. A performance measure has been added to track whether the ministry's approach to staff training continues to result in clients reporting high levels of respectful treatment.

Performance Measure	2022/23 Baseline	2023/24 Forecast	2024/25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target
[2d] WorkBC Client Satisfaction Score <sup>1</sup>	75	75	76	76	77

Data source: Employment and Labour Market Services Division, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, WorkBC Employment Services Client Intake Survey, In-Progress Survey and Exit Survey.

<sup>1</sup> WorkBC Client Satisfaction Score represents the overall client satisfaction with WorkBC services. Scores range from 0 to 100, with higher scores being considered better. The score represents the number of clients responding "satisfied" or "very satisfied" out of all survey respondents.

## Discussion

To monitor progress towards Goal 2, the ministry introduced automated surveys in March 2022 to receive feedback directly from WorkBC on their experience and their overall satisfaction with the services received. The ministry analyzes survey responses to identify themes which drive program policies and operational improvements. The ministry has experienced small changes in satisfaction scores since its implementation but expects to see increased satisfaction as program improvements are established over time.

## Goal 3: Persons with disabilities live, work and participate in their communities on an equal basis with all British Columbians

Persons with disabilities account for the majority of people served by the ministry and are a growing proportion of the total population. The ministry will continue to support people with disabilities by reducing barriers and promoting equal participation in the economy and society.

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

Persons with disabilities experience barriers that impede their ability to participate fully in their communities. The types of barriers persons with disabilities experience varies greatly depending on the nature of their disability and other intersecting factors. Working in the spirit of "nothing about us without us", the ministry will continue to advance programs and policies that support persons with disabilities in British Columbia to meaningfully participate in their communities.

## Key Strategies

- Provide adults with disabilities access to responsive services that support them in participating as full citizens and in achieving improved outcomes.
- Continue to work with persons with disabilities and their families, community stakeholders, public organizations, and the business community to develop solutions and strategies that improve the lives of persons with disabilities and identify barriers and solutions to improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities.
- Support the [Re-Imagining Community Inclusion \(RCI\)](#) Steering Committee to implement the [work plan](#) in response to the [10-Year Re-imagining Community Inclusion](#) Roadmap, to help improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities.
- Continue to support the transition process for youth with support needs when entering adulthood, to ensure they can access the ministry's disability assistance program and the adult community living services offered through Community Living BC.
- Support the continued implementation of the *Accessible British Columbia Act* with the goal to address barriers that hinder the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities, including through the development of new accessibility standards for B.C.

## Discussion

The ministry works across government and with external partners to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. The [Accessibility Directorate's](#) ongoing work to reduce barriers will improve inclusion and employment opportunities. The current priorities of the Accessibility Directorate are to create a culture of accessibility and inclusion, increase access to information and improve communications, improve accessibility of government buildings and transportation systems, increase employment in the B.C. public service, and improve the provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities.

Guided by the principle of “nothing about us, without us,” the ministry continues to work with families, the disability community, and the business community to improve the social and economic outcomes of persons with disabilities. For example, the ministry works with its Provincial Accessibility Committee and two Technical Committees to develop standards in the areas of accessible service delivery and employment accessibility. These accessibility standards will remove and prevent barriers that restrict persons with disabilities from equally participating in their community. The Presidents Group, a network of prominent business leaders, provides advice on best practices to make workplaces more accessible and inclusive and to improve employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

<b>Performance Measure</b>	<b>2022/23 Baseline</b>	<b>2023/24 Forecast</b>	<b>2024/25 Target</b>	<b>2025/26 Target</b>	<b>2026/27 Target</b>
[3a] Total amount of earnings exemptions reported by Persons with Disabilities cases	\$180 million	\$185 million	\$195 million	\$210 million	\$225 million

Data source: Research, Innovation and Policy Division, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

### **Discussion**

Employment is important for persons with disabilities, as it increases social inclusion and provides necessary income. The ministry's earnings exemptions allow persons with disabilities to keep more of their earnings. The amount of earned income exempted is an important measure of the success of the ministry's strategies to increase employment. It reflects not only the state of the economy but also the ministry's work to make the province more accessible and to increase employment rates for persons with disabilities.

An economic slowdown in 2024 may impact the employment and earnings of persons with disabilities, as they often work in sectors that are most impacted by an economic downturn. The continued work on making the province more accessible for persons with disabilities, as well as efforts by employment service providers, will help offset unemployment risks from an economic downturn and further improve employment and social inclusion outcomes over the next few years.

## Financial Summary

(\$000s)	<b>2023/24 Restated Estimates<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>2024/25 Estimates</b>	<b>2025/26 Plan</b>	<b>2026/27 Plan</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>				
Income Assistance	3,289,354	3,502,169	3,525,256	3,525,256
Employment	30,273	30,897	30,897	30,897
Community Living Services	1,410,433	1,626,906	1,669,397	1,669,397
Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal	1,915	1,945	1,945	1,945
Executive and Support Services	13,356	14,055	14,055	14,055
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,745,331</b>	<b>5,175,972</b>	<b>5,241,550</b>	<b>5,241,550</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>				
Executive and Support Services	1,854	2,124	1,854	1,854
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,854</b>	<b>2,124</b>	<b>1,854</b>	<b>1,854</b>

<sup>1</sup> For comparative purposes, amounts shown for 2023/24 have been restated to be consistent with the presentation of the 2024/25 Estimates.

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

## Appendix A: Public Sector Organizations

As of February 22, 2024, the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction is responsible and accountable for the following organizations:

### **Community Living BC**

Community Living British Columbia (CLBC) is a Crown agency that provides supports and services to meet the disability-related needs of two groups of eligible individuals and their families in British Columbia:

- Adults with a diagnosis of developmental disability. Criteria include age of onset, intellectual functioning, and adaptive behavior; and
- Adults who have a diagnosis of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder or autism spectrum disorder (also known as pervasive developmental disorder) and significant limitations in adaptive functioning.

### **Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal**

The Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal is an administrative tribunal established under the authority of the *Employment and Assistance Act* to provide clients with an efficient and transparent appeal process that is independent from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. The Tribunal hears appeals on decisions made by the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction to refuse, reduce or discontinue certain benefits or supplements. The Tribunal also hears appeals on decisions made by the Ministry of Children and Family Development to refuse, reduce or discontinue a subsidy under the *Child Care Subsidy Act*.