



BCACDI
The BC Association for Child Development and Intervention

November 8th, 2017

BC Human Rights Commission

Attention: Mr. Ravi Kahlon, MLA, Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and Multiculturalism
Re: Submission regarding the re-establishment of a BC Human Rights Commission

Dear Mr. Ravi Kahlon;

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission for the engagement process that will help inform recommendations about the restoration of a Human Rights Commission in BC. The BC Association of Child Development and Intervention, or BCACDI, is a provincial association of agencies that provide child development and therapy services to children and youth with special needs and their families. BCACDI has member agencies in communities in each region of BC, in both urban and rural settings, and delivers services to some of BC's most marginalized populations including aboriginal children and children in care.

BCACDI agencies offer the specialized supports and services that help children and families when a developmental delay is identified or when intervention to build family support and capacity is required. These agencies house the professions and occupations with the skill set and training to effectively and efficiently provide the necessary expertise, intervention, and support to help children, youth and families navigate through challenges impacting their ability to participate and function in their communities. Programs and services include Early Intervention Therapies to assist with mobility, daily function, and communication challenges (Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology), Infant Development Program to provide support and advice to families during the critical first few years of life, and Supported Child Development Program to provide the support for children and youth with special needs to participate in community child care settings. BCACDI's vision is for all children and youth requiring extra support and their families to have timely access to the most effective services that help them achieve their true potential.

Connection to the topic of Human Rights

BCACDI is connected to the topic of Human Rights through the programs and services our member agencies deliver, and what the growing body of literature in our sector reveals about the importance of early intervention. Children, youth, and families should have the right to timely access to the supports and services that will help them reach their full potential.

Why invest in early intervention?

- Disparities emerge early in life in children's physical, social/emotional and language/cognitive development that are largely attributable to the interplay of genetic factors and systematic differences in the nurturing qualities of their early environments: nutrition, bonding/attachment, stimulation, and opportunities for participation (Boyden & Levison, 2000);

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Irwin, 2006; Irwin & Johnson, 2005)

- Only 68% of BC children arrive at kindergarten meeting all of the developmental benchmarks they need to thrive both now and into the future- **32% are developmentally vulnerable** (UBC HELP, 2016)
- Day-to-day child rearing in environments characterized by impoverished parent-child interactions, even without dramatic, catastrophic events, may be implicated in adverse outcomes over time (Hart & Risley, 1995; Kishiyama, Boyce, Jimenez, Perry, & Knight, 2009)
- Some may hold out hope that we can compensate for high early vulnerability by increasing investments in the final years of school, in expanding post-secondary education, or in job skills training for adults. However, human development research warns against this hope because it ignores the genetic and biological reality of the human species: ***the early years represent the unique window in the human life course during which citizens' physical, socio-emotional and cognitive potential are especially malleable to the positive effects of strategic human capital investments***
- Canada is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our commitments under the Convention include the right for children to grow in environments in which their capacities can evolve, the right for children to play and to participate in decisions that affect them, and the right for children with special vulnerabilities to be protected from discrimination (UN General Assembly, 1989)

The Positive Return on Investment

- Economic analyses reveal that the 32% of children entering kindergarten developmentally vulnerable will impact the quality of the future labour force and cause BC to forgo GDP growth (UBC HELP, 2016)
- The early development research is now so compelling that there is a growing consensus among economists, such as Nobel Laureate James Heckman, that the most cost-effective human capital interventions occur among young children
- Early interventions targeted toward disadvantaged children have much higher returns than later interventions (Heckman, 2006)
- Poor investment now means we will pay more later on special needs education supports and youth justice programs
- The returns to society for each dollar invested extend from \$1.80 to \$17.07 (Rand Corporation, 2005)

The literature is compelling regarding the importance of intervening early when child development and family capacity is an issue, yet in many cases accessibility is a significant barrier for our most marginalized populations. BCACDI feels that access to the programs and services that will help children and families reach their developmental potential is a human rights issue. All children and families that would benefit from such programs and services should have the opportunity for timely and equitable access.

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Top issues the Parliamentary Secretary should consider in preparing his recommendations

1. Funding of the supports and services for children and youth with special needs and their families so that accessibility is equitable, and wait times decrease for our most marginalized populations

- It is not uncommon for wait times of up to a year for families to access some of the specialized supports and services available to them. One such example is the Supported Child Development Program, which provides support for children and youth with special needs to attend child care and pre-school settings. Some children require a high level of support, something the program calls 'extra-staffing,' where a one to one worker is assigned to the child to provide the support necessary for that child to attend that setting. Resource limitations in the sector are resulting in waits of several months and in some cases a year or more before 'extra staffing support' is available. This prevents the child from attending the preschool setting, and inhibits the ability for the parent/caregiver to participate in the work force. It is our belief that all children and youth have the right to access child care and early learning settings.

Equitable access is a significant issue in the sector. Children of indigenous ancestry, kids in care, and children living in rural and remote locations all face their own unique set of circumstances that inhibit their ability to access programs and services that support their development. A Human Rights Commission in BC could help hold both Government and the sector accountable to ensuring ongoing work towards equitable access to programs and services for children and youth and their families in BC.

2. Quality early care and learning settings

- Over the past several years BC has focused on increasing the availability of child care spaces in BC. This is a welcome step; however, the focus on increasing spaces has come at the expense of quality. The rapid increase in spaces has created a recruitment crisis for early childhood educators, resulting in cases of lowering standards and supervision ratios in child care settings. There needs to be a renewed focus on improving quality of training and ongoing competence of child care setting staff, as well as improved resources for the programs that support children and youth with special needs to attend these settings.

2. Inadequate support to ensure school attendance

- Some children and youth with challenges require support to attend school and education settings. There are several cases in BC schools where the education setting does not have sufficient resources and staffing to effectively support such students, thus the school has sent the student home or refused to allow the student to attend. It is our belief that all schools in BC should have the resources and expertise necessary to support all students to attend, regardless of behavioural challenges or other issues. All children and youth have the right to attend school.

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Advice for the Parliamentary Secretary to consider in preparing his recommendations

A Human Rights Commission in BC should be a resource for those marginalized populations in our Province that lack a strong collective voice. All too often children and youth with special needs are represented in these populations, and struggle to access the supports and services that the literature demonstrates will help them realize a greater developmental potential. Ensure that recommendations for the Human Rights Commission in BC includes the perspective of BC's children and youth with special needs and their families, and creates a culture of equitable access to Government programs and supports.

Conclusion

The BC Association of Child Development and Intervention appreciates the opportunity to meet with you and share our thoughts on the Human Rights Commission. Our member agencies are committed to providing effective services for children and youth with special needs, and look forward to collaboration and partnership with the Human Rights Commission to help BCACDI achieve our vision, that all children and youth requiring extra support and their families to have timely access to the most effective services that help them achieve their true potential.

If you have any questions regarding this submission please don't hesitate to contact Jason Gordon, Provincial Representative for the BC Association of Child Development and Intervention (BCACDI).

Regards,

Jason Gordon, MHS, BScPT
Provincial Advocate, BCACDI

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