



Supporting children and adults with developmental disabilities for 60+ years

## **ALBERTA'S ELECTION 2019 – URGENT NEED TO RAISE YOUR VOICE**

Alberta's 2019 provincial election has been announced. Now is the time to become engaged and continue to be engaged through the election process. We encourage you to meet and talk with the MLA candidates in your constituency using the six issues listed below, or others of your choosing. Take the time to make your interests known and what actions you expect from the candidates in your riding and their parties, if elected, that will improve the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

*Inclusion Alberta does not endorse any political party and offers no opinion on who anyone should vote for. All references to Alberta's political parties' statements, platforms or actions are based on information publicly available at the time of writing. The following is offered only in the interests of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families and to encourage Albertans to participate in the electoral process. At the end of this document you will find links to the Alberta parties giving you contact information on their candidates and information on their platforms. We encourage you to meet with candidates, attend candidate forums and seek commitments personally and in writing.*

### **Introduction**

As Alberta heads into an election it is more important than ever that the voices of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families be heard. With the economy still struggling and the deficit growing, all parties are expressing the need for fiscal responsibility in one form or another. The very real prospect of funding freezes, at best, and cuts, at worst, loom in all sectors. If the disability community does not mobilize to ensure the needs and aspirations of Albertans with disabilities are reflected in party platforms, there is a very real risk of increasing marginalization and diminished futures.

When family members are taken into account, the lives touched by the issues impacting the disability community account for approximately 25% of all Albertans. That's over a million people in our province. Yet, to date, no party has articulated a clear commitment to improving the lives of people with disabilities. We call on Alberta's political parties to listen to the hopes, dreams, challenges and concerns of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families and commit to collaborating to create a compelling vision for better, more inclusive lives, with corresponding action to achieve that future.

*Six specific issues particular to individuals with developmental disabilities, their families and allies are outlined below with questions that can be asked of candidates and their parties.*

1. Inclusive Education: A parent's right to choose and a child's right to a quality education
2. A planned approach to increased opportunities: Inclusive post-secondary education and employment
3. Home – In the truest sense of the word
4. Family-governed resource centres for Family Managed Supports (FMS)
5. Indigenous peoples in Alberta with developmental disabilities and their families
6. Eligibility

### **1. Inclusive Education: A parent's right to choose and a child's right to a quality education**

Access to an inclusive education, meaning a student with developmental disabilities is educated in a regular classroom with their non-disabled classmates and with appropriate accommodations and supports as needed, must be a parental choice that is honoured and respected; just as all the other educational decisions made by parents are typically honoured.

There are decades of research on the value and benefits of an inclusive education yet, in Alberta, access to an inclusive education is still a game of chance with a child's life. If a parent is lucky enough to live where there is a teacher or principal willing to include their child and provide needed supports, then their choice will likely be respected. However, if there is a different teacher, principal or school, or a family moves, then their choice of an inclusive education may be denied. Whether a child with disabilities is welcomed and included has little to do with the nature of their disability and almost everything to do with the values of educators. It is time to finally put an end to a child's quality inclusion being dependent upon where they live and whether there are willing teachers or principals at a moment in time. We need to end the fear parents who choose inclusion face annually as to whether their son or daughter will continue to be welcomed and included.

**Ensuring a parent's right to an inclusive education in legislation will provide the very necessary foundation in law and practice to ensure a quality education while holding schools and school districts accountable.**

However, access to the regular classroom, while necessary for an inclusive education to be offered, is insufficient in and of itself in ensuring the student with developmental disabilities will receive an appropriate education of equal quality to that provided to every other student. The regular curriculum needs to be modified to the degree necessary while instruction, lesson planning and the means of

measuring learner outcomes appropriately adapted. Students should also be supported to participate in the life of the school (e.g., field trips, school concerts and plays, etc.) with opportunities for friendships and relationships to be facilitated and encouraged. Although current legislation and court decisions require students and teachers to have needed supports and resources in place, this is neither ensured nor monitored. There is a wealth of materials and knowledge on how to provide quality inclusion and this needs to be brought to bear across all schools given the benefits to all students.

**Alberta Education, schools and school districts need to ensure that children with disabilities have access to an inclusive education where the regular curriculum is modified, and instruction is adapted as needed. Students with disabilities must be supported to participate in school activities and relationships between students with and without disabilities consciously encouraged and facilitated, with supports provided as needed.**

***Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their party, support a parent's right to choose an inclusive education and a child's right to a quality inclusive education.***

## **2. A planned approach to increased opportunities: Inclusive post-secondary education and employment**

Alberta's approach to increasing opportunities for a meaningful and inclusive life is often characterized by long periods of little to no progress interspersed with small advances. This is compounded as Alberta has no articulated vision or plan to enable individuals with developmental disabilities to live full and rich lives in community now and into the future. As such, with every new government families must wait to see if any commitment will be made to individuals with developmental disabilities and what and when that commitment will be evident. Long-proven approaches to creating good lives are not being systemically increased so that greater numbers of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families can access these opportunities and improve their life outcomes.

Youth employment: when high school age youth with developmental disabilities have had the opportunity for inclusive and paid part-time community employment during high school, their chances of being employed in the future increase dramatically. Utilizing peer supports, as Inclusion Alberta does, is a very cost effective and sustainable approach. However, only a very small number of students with developmental disabilities have this option in Alberta.

Inclusive post-secondary education: Everyone knows that access to a post-secondary education is almost essential in today's world and to having opportunities for better life outcomes. This is true for individuals with developmental disabilities who have benefited from Inclusion Alberta's development

and expansion of inclusive post-secondary opportunities across the province. Inclusion Alberta's success in inclusive post-secondary education has received international acclaim. The results speak for themselves, with students benefiting as much as their non-disabled peers and, on average, 70-80% gaining employment upon completing their studies. However, there is no planned growth to increase the number of young people year after year while maintaining quality. As such, the total number of individuals who have access to an inclusive post-secondary education remains small relative to the numbers who would love to go on to university, college or a technical institute. As a consequence, years may go by before even a small number of additional spaces are funded by government.

Employment: The vast majority of individuals with developmental disabilities in Alberta remain unemployed over the course of their life-span. This is not a function of their disability but of our province's failure to expand the proven means to increase opportunities, as most adults can be employed at least part-time in the regular workforce and business community. Inclusion Alberta's Rotary Employment Partnership which has created hundreds of "real jobs for real pay", as an example, has been formally recognized as world-leading, yet the province has no plan that ensures planned growth over time. We could be regularly increasing job opportunities across the province and sustaining individuals already employed if we and other organizations had funding that sustained current employment while matching the growth in opportunities the business world and Rotarians are so willingly wanting to create.

***Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their party, have a vision for an inclusive Alberta and are thus committed to supporting a planned approach to growing opportunities in employment and post-secondary education so that the means to a more promising life is made available to an increasing number of Albertans with developmental disabilities.***

### **3. Home – In the truest sense of the word**

Having a place that is truly one's home, whatever the housing structure (apartment, townhouse, condo, single family, etc.), is a universal human need across time and cultures. Given individuals with developmental disabilities are no less fully human than anyone else, they share in the same human desire and need for a place that reflects home in the fullest sense of our common understanding. There are three things that restrict most individuals with developmental disabilities from having a home as opposed to being housed – affordability, access to personal supports when and where needed, and accessibility for those with mobility challenges.

Many individuals with developmental disabilities are housed together not because this is where and how they wanted to create home for themselves or with the help of their families, but because they

cannot afford a place to live from the same range of housing options open to most people without developmental disabilities; and/or they don't have access to needed individualized supports and so must be grouped together, at times with strangers. However, Alberta is in a unique position given individuals and families can access individualized funding (Family Managed Supports - FMS) so that needed personal supports can be provided where people live rather than people having to live where the supports are. And there are service providers committed to supporting individuals to live in their own homes that could do more with funding that accommodates individuals rather than groups.

There is a concern with the billions of dollars the Federal government has announced for future low-cost housing over the next few years that these funds may be used to create more congregated living arrangements, rather than create inclusive options with affordable and accessible housing distributed within the housing options and communities open to all Albertans. We want to see this province, the Federal government, and housing developers work together with Inclusion Alberta and others to develop new housing that is inclusive, in addition to being accessible and affordable. Individuals with developmental disabilities require a future where their need and desire for a home of their own can be realized.

***Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their party, will ensure future housing developments in Alberta will be inclusive, affordable and accessible. Inclusive housing enables individuals with developmental disabilities to choose among the same housing options as is true for most Albertans and where supports as needed are delivered to them in their own homes (in contrast to congregate housing as described above).***

#### **4. Family-governed resource centres for Family Managed Supports (FMS)**

The number of families interested in and utilizing Family Managed Supports (FMS) continues to grow across Alberta however significant regional disparities exist and needed community resources have not been developed to keep pace with the growth. In some regions, families are well informed by PDD as to the merits of FMS and often advised to contact Inclusion Alberta for more information and/or assistance. In other regions, families may not even be told about FMS or are actively dissuaded from pursuing it as a funding option. FMS, as an approved provincial funding option, should be readily accessible as a choice.

It is a well-established reality, from decades of practice and experience locally, nationally and internationally, that more families will want to access FMS and realize its benefits when family-driven community resources are available to assist parents and individuals in utilizing FMS. The existence of Inclusion Alberta's Family Managed Supports Resource Center in Calgary, which has worked with over

500 families to-date, helps to explain why the uptake of FMS in Calgary is so much greater than in Edmonton; cities with comparable populations.

The Resource Centre in Calgary provides a wealth of services, including regular training events for families and FMS-funded staff, assistance with staff recruitment and employer responsibilities, and costing, budgeting and staffing arrangements. Most importantly, it works with families and individuals to create a vision and a plan for a meaningful and inclusive life and then assists with the implementation and refinement of that plan.

Whenever families are given the opportunity to learn about the existent Resource Centre and the difference it makes, they become advocates for similar resource centres in their communities. So, for years, families in communities outside of Calgary, along with Inclusion Alberta have been meeting with government MLAs, asking for Inclusion Alberta resource centres to be established in communities across the province, but no action has been taken to-date.

***Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their party will ensure FMS is a readily and equally accessible choice for individuals and families across the province and, given the increase in families wanting to access FMS, if they will support the creation of additional family-governed resource centres in communities across Alberta.***

##### **5. Indigenous Peoples in Alberta with Development Disabilities and their families**

PDD (Persons with Developmental Disabilities) funding and supports are not available to Indigenous peoples living on reserve. This means Indigenous people with developmental disabilities can only access needed supports and services by leaving their First Nations communities and homes. If they choose to remain within their First Nation, they and their families sacrifice access to the supports and funding that could make an invaluable difference to their lives. If they choose to leave in order to obtain supports, often feeling that this is not actually a freely-given choice, they sacrifice culture, community, family and friends.

Indigenous populations not living on reserves also access PDD at a disproportionately lower rate than population demographics would indicate should be the rate of access. The lack of Indigenous operated or culturally knowledgeable resources in Alberta compounds the level of disadvantage faced by Indigenous peoples in Alberta and their families. And while First Nations' families with children with disabilities can access FSCD (Family Support for Children with Disabilities) on and off reserve, it is vastly underutilized putting children and their families at risk.

***Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their party will negotiate with First Nations and the Federal government to ensure the availability of PDD funding on reserves***

***and collaborate with First Nations to ensure the provision of culturally relevant supports to assist families to access both FSCD and PDD on reserve. Additionally, what will they do to collaborate with Indigenous peoples in Alberta to develop culturally relevant supports and services, including access to FMS, for Indigenous peoples who do not live on reserves.***

## **6. Eligibility**

Until August 2009 the PDD eligibility criteria allowed for the PDD Program to consider individuals whose IQ scores were above 70. Eligibility could be granted to those individuals who had significant limitations in adaptive abilities and executive functioning as compared to their same-aged peers. Where an individual was denied eligibility, they or their family could appeal the decision, including taking the matter to court.

However, in 2009, government changed the criteria with the substantive difference being the regulatory requirement for an IQ score of 70 or less (within a confidence interval of 95%) with a psychological assessment to be completed within five years of the date of the PDD application. This created and continues to create crises for families whose family members do not meet the current IQ requirement yet clearly need supports given seriously compromised adaptive abilities and executive functioning. These are individuals who as children typically have or are receiving extensive supports from Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) given the complexity of their needs and the risks they pose to themselves and others. Yet, these families and their children are left without any supports the moment their son or daughter turns age 18, if they do not meet the current IQ requirement. This places families and individuals in harm's way.

An IQ score should not be the determinant in whether or not an individual qualifies for support. We are not suggesting that PDD extend beyond its original eligibility criteria but only that it returns to the criteria that existed before 2009 which allowed for reasonable flexibility and judgment to be applied with access to appeal when someone had significant limitations in adaptive skills and cognitive abilities.

***Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their party, will rescind the current PDD eligibility criteria based on a fixed IQ score and reinstate the criteria in place prior to August 1, 2009. Concurrently, will they ensure any impact related to additional Albertans being eligible for PDD supports be taken into account by government in the allocation of its resources, as was true prior to 2009?***

**Contact links for finding party platforms and candidates:**

[Alberta Advantage Party](#)

[Alberta Party](#)

[Freedom Conservative Party of Alberta](#)

[Green Party of Alberta](#)

[Liberal Party](#)

[New Democratic Party](#)

[United Conservative Party](#)

If you are unsure as to which electoral district you live in, you can find maps of electoral district boundaries here: [Alberta Electoral District Maps](#)

If you are receiving this in hard copy and would like the above web links, you can find this document on our website: [www.inclusionAlberta.org](http://www.inclusionAlberta.org)

**Please let us know when you meet with any MLA candidates in your constituency, when the meeting is scheduled, who is attending and then, later, we need you to share with us information on how the meeting went.** If we know that every MLA candidate, or close to it, has had a meeting with families, we are in a much better position to advance funding, policies and practices that affect lives of children and adults with developmental disabilities on a daily basis.