



Supporting children and adults with developmental disabilities for 60+ years

Alberta Election 2023 – Ensure Your Voice is Heard

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. 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 five 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. We call for 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.

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.

Five specific issues relevant to individuals with developmental disabilities, their families and allies are outlined below for you to consider raising.

1. **Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program (PDD) and Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD): Access and funding**
2. **Inclusive education: Ensuring access and quality**
3. **Indigenous children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families: Access to culturally relevant supports and resources**
4. **Expanding inclusive housing and ending institutionalization**
5. **Improving income security and increasing employment opportunities**

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program (PDD) and Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD): Access and Funding

Government reports from 2021 on [FSCD](#) and [PDD](#), a 2021 [report of the Auditor General, government's Open Data](#) and our own survey research reveal that FSCD and PDD are failing families and individuals with development disabilities. Families either find themselves having their supports and funding arbitrarily reduced or are denied needed supports while waiting lists grow to the thousands. Government's operating policies have grown increasingly distant if not entirely separate from the governing Legislation and Regulations, in effect thwarting the will of the Legislature itself.

The assistance previously available through these programs needs to be restored immediately. Based on the [government's Open Data](#), over 4000 families eligible for the FSCD program are without any support ("In planning"). That number has grown by 49% since April 2018. In the PDD program, the number of eligible individuals without support is over 2000. This amounts to over 6000 Alberta children and adults with disabilities who are without any disability-related supports, with those receiving inadequate support far exceeding this number.

In the past, these programs have played an essential social and economic role in Alberta, supporting families to raise their children with disabilities at home, parents to maintain their jobs, and adults with disabilities to live, work and participate in community life.

We are seeking the restoration or return of these programs to their past status of being supportive in their response to families and individuals.

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

- **Establishing a Ministerial task force with membership that is inclusive of family members and individuals with disabilities, Inclusion Alberta, and other relevant parties to create an action plan to return the FSCD and PDD programs to compliance with the intent of governing legislation and by acting on the multiple reviews to date.**
- **Stopping the unnecessary reduction of existing supports and ensure families are treated by government's frontline representatives with respect and trust.**
- **Immediately restoring adequate funding to the FSCD and PDD programs.**
- **Developing a plan in consultation with Inclusion Alberta and other relevant parties, to eliminate waitlists over a four-year period. Funding and implementing the plan.**
- **Ensuring future funding for these programs accommodates demographic growth and inflation.**

- **Establishing a standing Ministerial advisory committee for PDD inclusive of family members, persons with developmental disabilities, Inclusion Alberta, and other relevant parties. The committee would provide advice and recommendations on policy and practice for PDD and serve as a means by which government can assess the effectiveness of the PDD program.**

In reference to this last point, a PDD Advisory Committee previously existed and government's [review of the PDD program](#) in 2021 concluded that this is still needed.

Provide Advances to Pay for Services with FSCD:

[Research has shown](#) that families from lower Socio-Economic Status neighbourhoods access FSCD at far lower rates than other families. Poverty impacts [16% of children and youth in Alberta](#) and for [Indigenous children living "on reserve" the poverty rate is 53%](#). Many of these families cannot afford to pay for services and supports upfront and then wait weeks for reimbursement from FSCD. The Child and Youth Advocate points to up-front payment for services as a change that will provide families with earlier support to access services and lessen their emotional and financial stress. Advances rather than reimbursement to pay for services is already provided to families through the PDD program and there is no reason families whose children are under 18 and therefore use FSCD rather than PDD should not be treated the same.

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

Implementing the recommendation from the [Child and Youth Advocate](#) that the FSCD program ensure access for families facing financial and social barriers by providing families with an advance as per their FSCD Agreement, as has been PDD's practice for years.

Provide Sufficient Wage Adjustment for Disability Support Workers:

The announcement in December 2022 of a 10% funding increase for wages in PDD and FSCD contracts is a positive development. This wage increase will compensate for the 10% inflation experienced in Alberta between February 2021 and December 2022. Additional wage increases are still desperately needed because this is the first wage increase since 2014, a period over which there has been 21% inflation. It is exceedingly difficult to attract qualified workers, and many have been forced to leave the sector or work multiple jobs simply to cover basic expenses such as food and housing. This has resulted in a severe staffing shortage for both families and service providers, placing individuals with developmental disabilities and their families at risk.

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

Address the staffing crisis in the disability sector by providing a sufficient wage adjustment to fully compensate for eight years of stagnant wages, attract qualified people to the sector, and demonstrate their value and role in assisting Albertans with disabilities to live lives of dignity, security, and inclusion.

Inclusive Education: Ensuring Access and Quality

Obtaining access to a quality inclusive education for children with developmental disabilities in the regular classroom setting with appropriate supports remains a yearly challenge for thousands of families.

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

Ensuring the right of parental choice for an inclusive education for students with developmental disabilities to be educated in regular classrooms, with appropriate supports for both students and teachers, and that this right be protected in legislation or a ministerial order.

Seclusion and Restraint in Schools

Alberta Education's introduction in 2019 of "Standards for the Use of Seclusion and Physical Restraint in Alberta Schools" was an important first step in protecting students with disabilities. However, the use of seclusion and restraint is still permitted, and Alberta Education has provided no transparent monitoring and accountability on the continued use of the practice. A robust investment in training for teachers, school districts and support staff in positive behaviour supports and practices is required, with seclusion and isolation to no longer be considered an acceptable strategy or response for any student.

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

Conducting an external review (inclusive of families, Inclusion Alberta and other relevant parties) to measure the use of seclusion and physical restraint in Alberta schools, assess the effectiveness of the Standards for the Use of Seclusion and Physical Restraint in Alberta Schools (Ministerial Order #042/2019), and provide recommendations on more effective and proven means of addressing behaviour challenges as a means of ending the use seclusion and restraints.

Re-Establishing a Minister’s Advisory Committee on Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities

For 30 years Alberta’s Minister of Education was advised by an advisory committee of representatives from relevant parties first on special education and later, on inclusive education for students with disabilities. This committee, which had representation from Inclusion Alberta and other family organizations representing children with disabilities has not been convened for more than three years. Teachers, school boards, and superintendents continue to be consulted regularly by Alberta Education but there is no mechanism to ensure that, amid competing perspectives and priorities, the perspective of the parents of students with disabilities is being taken into account in advancing the inclusive education of students with disabilities.

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

Committing to establishing a Minister’s Advisory Committee on Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities, reporting directly to the Minister of Education, including families, representative organizations, and experts in inclusive education for children with disabilities. The committee would provide advice and recommendations on policy and practice for inclusive education for students with disabilities.

Include the Rights and Values of Persons with Disabilities in Curriculum

Even as the curriculum has changed to advance representation of other historically marginalized groups, both the current experience of people with disabilities and the history of eugenics, institutionalization, stereotyping and discriminatory segregation continues to be ignored in Alberta’s curriculum.

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

Ensure that future curriculum updates consult people with disabilities and their families on the design and content of curriculum, and that the curriculum advances the rights and value of persons with disabilities.

Indigenous Children and Adults with Developmental Disabilities and their families: Access to culturally relevant supports and resources

Currently supports for adults with developmental disabilities are not available within First Nations due to unresolved jurisdictional differences between the federal and provincial governments. This systemic discrimination continues to mean that adults with developmental

disabilities and their families, who live on reserve, experience great hardships and vulnerabilities. First Nations individuals with developmental disabilities and their families can only access needed Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) supports and services by leaving their First Nations' communities, homes, and families. 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 or are forced to leave to obtain supports, they sacrifice culture, community, family, and friends.

Indigenous populations not living on reserves also access PDD and Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) at a disproportionately lower rate than the rest of the population. The lack of Indigenous operated or culturally knowledgeable resources in Alberta compounds the level of disadvantage faced by Indigenous people in Alberta. And while First Nations' families with children with disabilities can access FSCD 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 parties will commit to:

Negotiating 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, taking into account which First Nations may want to operate under their jurisdiction PDD and FSCD on reserves. Additionally, the government must collaborate with Indigenous Albertans to develop culturally relevant supports and services, including access to PDD and FSCD, for Indigenous people who do not live on reserves.

Expanding Inclusive Housing and Ending Institutionalization

Every province but two, of which Alberta is one, have either closed their institutions for persons with developmental disabilities or are actively closing them, with one province (Nova Scotia) having to do so now by complying with a human rights commission finding [upheld by its Court of Appeal](#), with the Supreme Court of Canada refusing to hear the province's appeal. These efforts are consistent with the overwhelming preponderance of evidence of the incalculable harm suffered by persons with disabilities when institutionalized, and the violation of their rights as enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

There is a pressing need for persons with developmental disabilities, including those with complex needs, to have access to housing, a home, and the supports to live and participate in community life. The evidence is clear that housing persons with developmental disabilities with

complex needs is best done in settings that are intimate and personal as larger congregate settings exacerbate the challenges exponentially. This need for a place with access to necessary supports must never be met by building segregated settings that congregate large numbers of people with developmental disabilities. Institutions for people with developmental disabilities have notoriously failed throughout history, resulting in governments incurring substantial costs for reparations and damages. Internationally and in Alberta's own historical experience, the per person costs of institutional care are greater with less commensurate quality of life, than when the same individuals are supported to live in community.

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

Working with Inclusion Alberta and other relevant parties to develop and increase inclusive housing with appropriate supports for persons with disabilities, including those with complex needs, so that they can have a home in community that provides for safety, development, and well-being.

Further to commit to not building any new facilities that are institutional in nature, which by definition segregates and congregates persons with developmental disabilities, particularly those with complex needs, in a household size that is much larger than the average household in Alberta.

Lastly, to join the rest of Canada and the world by developing a personalized and individualized approach to close Alberta's few remaining institutions for persons with developmental disabilities.

Improving Income Security and Increasing Employment Opportunities

Canada Disability Benefit

The federal government's proposed Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) will be an effective poverty reduction measure for people with disabilities only if the Government of Alberta exempts these payments from eligibility and benefit calculations for existing provincial income benefits, health benefits, transportation allowances, affordable housing, adaptive equipment programs, employment supports, and other in-kind benefits for people who receive the Canada Disability Benefit (CDB).

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

No provincial clawbacks related to the Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) and to exempt CDB income from eligibility calculations for any programs, when the CDB is introduced.

Increase Funding for Employment Opportunities

Increasing employment for people with developmental disabilities will strengthen Alberta's economy by helping to address labour shortages, reducing government expenditures on AISH, and increasing consumer spending through employment. People with developmental disabilities have career aspirations, significant social and economic contributions to make through employment, and benefit from both the support network and the income that come with a job. Any approach to reducing poverty must recognize that people with developmental disabilities want and need more than financial assistance but as importantly require access to jobs and support to secure and maintain their employment.

Inclusion Alberta through its Youth Employment Partnership, Inclusive Post-Secondary Initiative and partnerships with Rotary Clubs and businesses has created over 1000 inclusive employment opportunities to-date at or above minimum wage and without wage supplements. Employment supports from the Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) program are indispensable as the supports available through Alberta Income and Employment Supports do not address the specific needs of people with developmental disabilities.

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

Increasing funding through the PDD program to create and sustain inclusive employment, recognizing the unique barriers that people with developmental disabilities face.

Hire More People with Developmental Disabilities in the Alberta Public Service

In addition to providing support for people with developmental disabilities to acquire and maintain inclusive employment in the private and non-profit sectors, the Government of Alberta must also ensure that as Alberta's largest employer it is employing people with developmental disabilities. In 2018 the Alberta Public Service began a partnership to hire people with developmental disabilities but fewer than 5 people are currently being employed through the initiative. In contrast, the City of Edmonton employs 44 individuals with developmental disabilities (while the Calgary Public library employs 11 people). The Alberta Public Service has 27,000 employees but a municipality with a 1/5 the workforce has hired 9 times the number of people with developmental disabilities (and a library system with only 800 employees has hired more people with developmental disabilities than the Alberta government).

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

Increasing the inclusive employment of people with developmental disabilities within the Alberta Public Service.

Stop Deducting Employment Insurance Benefits from AISH

People with disabilities who are employed make the same EI contributions as anyone else and so they should benefit fully from EI. The AISH policy which deducts Employment Insurance (EI) earnings dollar for dollar is unfair and contrary to the intent of AISH to encourage Albertans with disabilities to seek employment whenever possible.

Ask the candidates in your constituency if they, and their parties will commit to:

Changing the AISH Policy to treat EI as earned income, to be deducted only in accordance with earned income and not dollar for dollar.