



BC Community Living Action Group (BC-CLAG)

A provincial network of service, support, and advocacy organizations, family groups, & other community living stakeholders

PRESS RELEASE

Putting 'families first' includes restoring disability supports, report says

Community living partners present solutions to a growing crisis for adults with developmental disabilities

For immediate Release

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Vancouver – A “Families First” agenda for British Columbia should include listening to families who are struggling to support adults with developmental disabilities, says the B.C. Community Living Action Group (BC-CLAG).

This is a key theme of a consensus report released today by BC-CLAG, with eight recommendations to resolve a growing community living crisis. The report, *“Reaching Out, Weighing In,”* emerged from a broad community dialogue launched in 2010 by all major partner groups, including families, self advocates, service providers and support staff.

The report warns that sweeping cuts to residential and other supports are violating the fundamental rights of people with disabilities to autonomy, independence, choice, and support. They also impose a crushing lifetime burden on families. Adults and their families are being denied a voice in individual and system redesign decisions that have major consequences, including potential safety risks. A key need identified during public forums hosted by BC-CLAG last fall was an independent provincial advocate who could provide monitoring, oversight and public reporting to protect the rights and safety of adults with developmental disabilities.

“We strongly support our Premier’s new commitment to families and we urge her to start listening to those who are struggling,” says BC-CLAG member Anita Dadson of BC FamilyNet “Families provide 90% of supports for adults with developmental disabilities. But we cannot continue to play the lead role without critical supports like respite and a full range of residential options for adults who cannot live safely on their own or with their families.”

The BC-CLAG initiative was sparked by growing alarm over a “service redesign” launched by Community Living BC in 2010, with a stated goal of reducing costs by C\$22 million. Thirty-three group homes were closed in Victoria, Maple Ridge, Chilliwack, Surrey, Kamloops, Williams Lake, and Terrace between March 31 and December 31, 2010. If the closures continue at this pace, BC-CLAG estimates that one in three B.C. group homes serving adults with developmental disabilities will have closed by 2016

Respite, day programs and other supports have also been cut, leaving families and adults struggling to cope. Many remain on lengthy waitlists or face significantly reduced choices when they are finally able to access services.

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Despite government assurances that no one is being forcibly moved, the report notes numerous complaints documenting such occurrences. "Forcing people from their homes, denying them choices and cutting them off from families, friends and communities, against their wishes and the pleas of their families, violates every commitment the BC government made when it established CLBC," says BC-CLAG member Dawn Steele of Moms on the Move.

B.C.'s community living support system is chronically underfunded. By 2013, demand for adult services will have risen by 60% in a decade. Over roughly the same period, the provincial government budget has remained static in real terms.

"As Community Living BC continues to defund services and supports, we will lose dedicated, well-trained and committed staff," says BC-CLAG member James Cavaluzzo. "There is a real issue of recruitment and retention in the community living sector, which is a major problem for individuals and families who need support."

The report's key recommendations include:

1. **Increase provincial funding** to meet the support needs of adults with developmental disabilities and their families, and allocate funding equitably and strategically.
2. **Create an independent advocate** with a broad legislated mandate to improve supports and outcomes for adults with developmental disabilities by providing oversight, monitoring and public reporting.
3. **Include individuals and families** in decision making by listening, by offering meaningful choices and by respecting their diverse and changing needs.
4. **Consult and collaborate** with service agencies, front-line workers, disability advocates, and other stakeholders with key knowledge and expertise.
5. **Introduce provincial legislation** setting out the inclusion rights and support entitlements of adults with developmental disabilities.

About BC-CLAG

The BC Community Living Action Group (BC-CLAG) is a network of self-advocates, families, support staff and agencies who support adults with disabilities.

BC-CLAG includes: BC Coalition of People with Disabilities, Moms on the Move, BC FamilyNet, BC Government and Service Employees' Union, Developmental Disabilities Association, BC Association for Community Living, Health Sciences Association of BC, Hospital Employees' Union, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees. To learn more, visit <http://communitylivingaction.org>

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