



B.C. Budget Strong on Social Funding

VICTORIA – Today’s first full year provincial budget for the NDP government focuses on a number of key social and development issues that play a significant role in determining the health and well-being of British Columbians, including substantial investments in housing, child care and Indigenous priorities.

Nurses in British Columbia applaud government’s focus on the social determinants of health, and look forward to further detail on how this new funding will be rolled out to enhance the long-term health goals of British Columbians. At the same time, ARNBC and nurses in B.C. question the lack of specific health funding and information provided in this budget and hope government will be more forthcoming on how health care providers and other experts will be engaged in the decision-making processes.

“As nurses, we know that some of the best ways to improve the health of families, communities and individuals, is by focusing on key determinants that help promote good health – employment, housing, education, food security and transit, to name a few,” said Tania Dick, ARNBC President. “Government’s focus on these key issues demonstrates a focus on social policy that we know will benefit nurses, their families, and the patients we see every single day.”

Some budget highlights that will positively influence the health of British Columbians include:

- Investments in child care and early learning that include a new benefit to provide up to \$1,250 per month in child care cost relief beginning in 2020; child care fee reductions for eligible families; and the creation of more than 22,000 new licensed child care spaces. The NDP commitment to \$10/day child care is not mentioned.
- Changes to Fair PharmaCare which will eliminate deductibles and expand coverage for families earning \$45,000 or less.
- Restoration of the free bus pass or monthly transportation supplement for those receiving disability assistance.
- Investments to support British Columbia’s Indigenous Peoples by increasing housing; bolstering FNHA’s work to support mental health and wellness in Indigenous communities; dedicated funds for Indigenous skills training such as computer literacy and safety training; and investments to revitalize connections to Indigenous languages.
- Increases to SAFER (Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters) and a commitment to providing more qualified support staff in assisted living facilities.
- The elimination of MSP Fees for all British Columbians (as previously announced), with the addition of the new Employers Tax Act which will place the associated burden on Employers.



This year's budget also highlights the need for expanded coverage of primary care providers and access to team-based care for all British Columbians, but particularly those who are struggling to find a family physician or nurse practitioner. The Ministry of Health, through its strategic plan, is tasked with developing a primary care model that provides comprehensive and coordinated team-based care linked to specialized services. This model recognizes that family physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses and other primary and community care allied health professionals and support staff are central to the effort of supporting all patients.

"I am very pleased to see that government and the Ministry of Health have included nurses and nurse practitioners in the discussion of how to strengthen and improve primary health care in B.C.," said Dick. "For too many years we have wondered how the largest and arguably most integral member of the health care team has been left out of the service plans for government. Nurses are part of the patient experience from birth to death, throughout every hospital or clinic visit, within the communities and schools, and in the home or care facility and their knowledge and expertise must be respected and included in any decision that impacts primary care."

Despite some of the welcome advances for individual British Columbians through targeted funding on issues impacting determinants of health, the 2018 budget falls short on some key issues that concern nurses – such as the ongoing opioid crisis, the role of home and community health in supporting seniors; the lack of follow-through on the renter's subsidy; and the ongoing stigma and gaps in health care for Indigenous people. ARNBC and nurses around the province will continue to be a strong voice in advocating for further funding and ongoing systems change in these and other critical areas that nurses identify.

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