

# Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

## Program Notes 2022/2023

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**Ministry of Social Development and Poverty  
Reduction**

**2020/21  
Annual Service Plan Report**

**August 2021**



For more information on the Ministry of Social Services and Poverty Reduction contact:

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Published by the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

## Minister's Accountability Statement



The *Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction 2020/21 Annual Service Plan Report* compares the Ministry's actual results to the expected results identified in the *2020/21 – 2022/23 Service Plan* created in February 2020. I am accountable for those results as reported.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "N. Simons". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Honourable Nicholas Simons  
Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction  
August 9, 2021

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## Letter from the Minister

As the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, I am pleased to present the *Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction 2020/21 Annual Service Plan Report*, which summarizes our work and highlights achievements from April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021.

The past 18 months have challenged the people of British Columbia like no other, and in many ways the people most affected were also our most vulnerable. The pandemic impacted housing, food security, and access to supports. It also made clear the inequities that remain for too many in our society.

The Ministry quickly pivoted to address immediate challenges by implementing a monthly crisis supplement in 2020, followed by a recovery supplement in 2021, for Ministry clients who were ineligible for the Canada Emergency Response and Canada Recovery Benefits. B.C. was the only province to fully exempt the emergency federal support programs to ensure people receiving income assistance or disability assistance got the full benefit of that support. Additionally, Ministry staff worked closely with Ministry of Finance staff to ensure that people who were receiving income or disability assistance automatically received the BC Recovery Benefit.

To provide stability for people and families, we announced the largest-ever permanent increase to income assistance and disability assistance rates, effective April 2021. This increase in rates was the third since July 2017, putting B.C.'s income and disability assistance rates among the highest in the country. At the same time, the Senior's Supplement was increased for the first time since 1987, benefitting up to 80,000 low-income seniors.

Our work continues to be guided by [TogetherBC](#), B.C.'s poverty reduction strategy. While the impact of the pandemic on poverty rates is not yet fully understood, as part of the Ministry's mandates of poverty reduction and reconciliation, we introduced the First Nations Well Being Fund, a \$2.7 million investment directed at First Nations to promote well-being, improve quality of life for community members, and find solutions to poverty in their communities.

In order to ensure B.C.'s economic recovery is inclusive, we invested \$10 million in employment services for people with developmental disabilities and invested \$5.5 million in the Work Experience Opportunity Grant. The Work Experience Opportunity Grant is helping organizations provide work experience opportunities to people with disabilities, Indigenous people and people facing multiple barriers to employment.

We are also making significant progress toward a more accessible and inclusive province with the introduction and passing of the *Accessible British Columbia Act*. This act allows government to establish accessibility standards and identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility and inclusion. The Parliamentary Secretary for Accessibility will work to ensure the act is well understood and is effective.

The appointment of a Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development and Non-Profits – a role unique in Canada – created a new area of focus for the Ministry and our government; it signals the importance of the non-profit sector as we recover from the pandemic.



We're committed to making life better for all British Columbians and will continue to work across government to ensure that those most in need have support and access to the services they need.



Honourable Nicholas Simons  
Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction  
August 9, 2021

## Purpose of the Annual Service Plan Report

The Annual Service Plan Report is designed to meet the requirements of the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act* (BTAA), which sets out the legislative framework for planning, reporting and accountability for Government organizations. Under the BTAA, the Minister is required to report on the actual results of the Ministry's performance related to the forecasted targets documented in the previous year's Service Plan.

## Purpose of the Ministry

The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (SDPR) focuses on reducing poverty, creating opportunities and increasing inclusion. The purpose of the Ministry is to provide strategic leadership and quality services that empower British Columbians in need to share in the Province's prosperity, so that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in their community and to reach their full potential.

SDPR is guided by four pieces of legislation: the *Employment and Assistance Act*, the *Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act*, the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act*, and the *Community Living Authority Act*. The Minister is responsible for Community Living BC (CLBC) and is supported by the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development and Non-Profits and the Parliamentary Secretary for Accessibility. The Ministry's key responsibilities include:

- Leading development and implementation of a cross-government, province-wide poverty-reduction strategy - TogetherBC: BC's Poverty Reduction Strategy;
- Supporting the work of the Attorney General and Minister responsible for Housing and other government initiatives to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness in British Columbia;
- Leading development and implementation of cross-government, province-wide accessibility legislation to identify and remove barriers and prevent the creation of new barriers for people with disabilities;
- Providing income, disability, and supplemental assistance for people in need;
- Providing an integrated system of employment programs, services and supports to all British Columbians through WorkBC;
- Working with community, business, and government partners to increase accessibility, employment, independence, and inclusion for individuals with disabilities;
- Leading collaborative engagement through the Social Services Sector Roundtable to help strengthen the important community social services that people count on every day; and
- Through Community Living BC, supporting community living services for adults with developmental disabilities and their families.

## Strategic Direction

The strategic direction set by Government in 2017, and expanded upon in Minister Shane Simpson's 2017 Mandate Letter shaped the goals, objectives, performance measures and

financial plan outlined in the [2020/21 Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction Service Plan](#) and the actual results reported on in this annual report.

The global pandemic resulted in many shifts in priorities, structures, and operations across the public sector. Any changes to Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction goals, objectives, performance measures or financial plan to align with the strategic direction established by Government in late 2020 are presented in the 2021/22 Service Plan.

## **Operating Environment**

With 522,000 British Columbians living in poverty according to the Market Basket Measure<sup>1</sup>, BC currently has the sixth highest poverty rate in the country. This number includes 60,000 children in low-income families and about 54,000 seniors.

The Ministry continued with service delivery improvements to provide consistent and responsive services and updated its [public service commitment and service standards](#), ensuring clients are served as quickly and efficiently as possible, through all service channels. The Office of Homelessness Coordination (OHC) was formed at SDPR to work across government and with external partners for a coordinated approach in preventing and responding to homelessness. This program was transferred to the Ministry of Attorney General on November 26, 2020.

The Ministry offered employment services and supports for unemployed or precariously employed British Columbians to help them achieve sustainable employment. Serving over 82,000 people annually, WorkBC Employment Services offered programs ranging from customized supports for people with disabilities to funding for communities and organizations to increase employment and work experience. WorkBC Employment Services were delivered through 102 WorkBC Centres, as well as a strong online presence, to provide services that can be accessed from anywhere in the province and flexibility for clients to choose what works best for them. The Ministry supports CLBC in its initiatives and partnerships to increase community inclusion, accessibility, employment opportunities and services for persons with developmental disabilities.

## **Demographics and Economy**

BC Employment and Assistance (BCEA) program caseloads are affected by demographic and economic factors. The income assistance caseload is very sensitive to the state of the labour market and increased quickly at the start of the pandemic. However, federal income support programs implemented in 2020 to support Canadians impacted by the pandemic, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and the Canada Recovery Benefit, reduced the caseload growth rate. In 2020/21, the income assistance caseload increased by 3.1 per cent, down from a 5.5 per cent increase the previous year.

The disability assistance caseload, made up of individuals who have a disability designation, has continued to grow as the result of longer life expectancies and an aging population. The pandemic had a small impact on the disability assistance caseload as pandemic-related federal

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<sup>1</sup> 2019 Markey Basket Measure. Statistics Canada. [Table 11-10-0135-01 Low income statistics by age, sex and economic family type](#)

support benefits were exempt for existing disability assistance clients. The disability assistance caseload increased by 3.8 per cent in 2020/21.

British Columbia's economy declined in 2020, as the negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic pushed economies all over the world into deep recessions. B.C.'s real GDP contraction of 3.8 per cent was the fourth smallest among provinces (behind Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick). The decline in B.C.'s real GDP was almost entirely driven by service-producing industries, while goods-producing industries had modest declines. Output in the arts, entertainment and recreation, accommodation and food services and transportation were some of the main drivers of the decrease in the service sector. In B.C.'s goods producing sector declines in manufacturing and natural resources were partially offset by increases in the construction sector. Employment in BC decreased by 6.6 per cent in 2020. However, wages and salaries remained relatively stable compared to 2019 as low wage workers accounted for the majority of job losses. Retail trade increased by 1.3 per cent in 2020, while consumer prices increased by 0.8 per cent. Residential construction activity slowed but remained relatively strong, with housing starts declining in 2020 after experiencing all-time highs in 2019. In contrast, after declining for three consecutive years home sales reached record levels in late 2020. On the external front, global international trade experienced significant disruptions as the pandemic unfolded. B.C.'s international merchandise exports contracted in 2020 reflecting a combination of weaker global demand and lower commodity prices.

## Report on Performance: Goals, Objectives, Measures and Targets

### Goal 1: Reduce Poverty in British Columbia

#### Objective 1.1: Implement the cross-government, province-wide Poverty Reduction Strategy

##### Key Highlights

- The BC Child Opportunity Benefit was implemented in October 2020, providing families with up to \$1,600 per year for the first child, \$1,000 for the second child, and \$800 for each additional child under the age of 18.
- The Ministry provided temporary income supports to income and disability assistance clients and low-income seniors to help them meet the additional costs arising from the pandemic.
- The Ministry exempted all pandemic-related federal income support benefits from the determination of eligibility and assistance amounts for income and disability assistance clients
- The minimum wage was increased to \$14.60 from \$13.85 on June 1, 2020.
- The Province provided two one-time benefits to support British Columbians through the pandemic: the BC Emergency Benefit for Workers provided a tax-free \$1,000 payment to BC residents, excluding Ministry clients, whose ability to work was affected due to the pandemic and the BC Recovery Benefit provided a tax-free payment of up to \$1,000 for eligible families and single parents and up to \$500 for eligible individuals.

Performance Measure(s)	2016 Baseline	2019 Actuals	2020-2024 Target
1.1a Total Poverty Rate <sup>1</sup>	15.3%	10.8%	11.5%
1.1b Child Poverty Rate <sup>1</sup>	17.0%	7.2%	8.5%

Data source: Statistics Canada. [Table 11-10-0135-01 Low income statistics by age, sex, and economic family type.](#)

<sup>1</sup>The legislated targets are based on calendar years (not fiscal years) and reflect a 25% reduction for overall poverty and a 50% reduction in child poverty from 2016 data. The most recent federal data released in March 2021 provides low income statistics for 2019.

### Discussion of Results

British Columbia has met both poverty reduction targets ahead of 2024 but must now work to maintain this progress in response to the pandemic. The province will not receive information on how the pandemic and federal and provincial income supports provided in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted poverty statistics until March 2022. BC's Child Opportunity Benefit was implemented in October 2020 so the province will not see the full impact until 2021 data released in 2023.

The province's post-pandemic economic recovery strategy seeks to benefit all British Columbians, including those who work in sectors severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and who are often living in low-income.

**Goal 2: British Columbians in need have services, supports and opportunities that make life better**

**Objective 2.1: Deliver reliable, responsive, consistent, accessible, and secure income and disability assistance services**

Delivering modern and consistent service with a focus on reliability, responsiveness, and relationship building has been a key priority. The Ministry continues to expand and improve online self-service options which increases accessibility of services for clients regardless of their location in British Columbia. The Ministry increased safety measures and implemented additional strategies to support responsive services for our clients during the pandemic.

**Key Highlights**

- Implemented temporary program measures to support staff and clients in response to the pandemic, including a temporary monthly crisis supplement in 2020, followed by a recovery supplement in 2021.
- Rolled out the Queue Management System to all Community Services offices to support in-person service delivery and enhance point of contact services.
- Extended the cut-off date for submitting monthly reports in My Self Serve.
- Improved accessibility of disability applications by temporarily providing electronic versions online for health professionals.
- Provided comprehensive training on Administrative Fairness, Discretionary Decision-Making, and the Decision-Making Model to front-line staff.

Performance Measure(s)	2019/20 Actuals	2020/21 Target	2020/21 Actuals	2021/22 Target <sup>1</sup>	2022/23 Target <sup>1</sup>
2.1 Number of clients using My Self-Serve	87,109	96,000	97,543	99,000	101,000

Data source: Service Delivery Division, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

<sup>1</sup> The targets for 2021/22 and 2022/23 were adjusted (increased) in the [2021/22 Service Plan](#).

**Discussion of Results**

This performance measure reflects the percentage of Ministry clients using online services. An increase to this number means that more clients are accessing income assistance services by the most flexible and efficient means available.

The target for 2020/21 has been achieved, and there has been a steady increase of clients leveraging this service since its implementation in fall of 2014. The Ministry’s response to the pandemic included additional promotion of using My Self Serve to further support physical distancing and ensure the health and safety of clients and Ministry employees.

## Objective 2.2: WorkBC Employment Services clients achieve employment

### Key Highlights

- WorkBC Employment Services moved to a virtual service delivery model due to the pandemic. Over 82,000 clients received services virtually or in-person by appointment when virtual services were not suitable or possible. This included personalized case management services to more than: 14,700 clients with disabilities, 7,300 Indigenous clients, and 19,000 immigrant clients.
- As part of the [StrongerBC](#) economic recovery plan, [Work Experience Opportunity Grants](#) (WEOG) were made available for eligible organizations to provide 12-week work experience opportunities for vulnerable individuals impacted by the pandemic. \$5.5 million in grants were issued in 2020/21 to support just over 1,100 participants.
- In response to the rapidly changing labour market and to support recovery efforts, the Ministry committed over \$25 million to fund 141 projects that create work experience and training opportunities to prepare job seekers for available jobs and support an inclusive economic recovery in BC communities.
- WorkBC Apprentice Services and WorkBC Assistive Technology Services supported over 13,000 apprentices to complete classroom apprenticeship training and provided almost \$2.4 million for assistive technology for over 550 individuals with disabilities to overcome work-related barriers and thrive in the workplace.

Performance Measure(s) <sup>3</sup>	2018/19 Baseline	2019/20 Actuals	2020/21 Target	2020/21 Actuals	2021/22 Target	2022/23 Target
2.2 The number of clients <sup>1</sup> who achieve employment <sup>2</sup>	24,400	18,000	27,800	12,900	28,300	28,300

Data source: Employment and Labour Market Services Division, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

<sup>1</sup> Clients are self-serve and case managed participants who received WorkBC services and/or supports.

<sup>2</sup> Employment is defined as when a client attains a full-time job (30 or more hours/week) or a part-time job (when part-time employment is desired; less than 30 hours/week), or self-employment (business is implemented and considered optional), after receiving WorkBC services and/or supports.

<sup>3</sup> The performance measure was updated in the [2021/22 Service Plan](#) to include self-serve clients as well as case managed clients because many new Employment Insurance clients are expected to be employment-ready after the pandemic. New and existing WorkBC services can help these clients become re-employed without case management.

### Discussion of Results

The results for 2020/21 did not meet the target, as the number of clients employed was lower than anticipated as a result of the pandemic. Fewer people have been seeking employment services and supports due to health and safety concerns as well as the availability of federal and provincial income supports. The availability of federal benefits such as the Canada Recovery Benefit contributed to the ability of individuals to delay seeking re-entry into the labour market during the pandemic. It has also been harder for clients to achieve employment, within industries such as retail, construction, food services and hospitality, as these industries needed to reduce capacity in adherence with public health restrictions.

**Goal 3: Individuals with disabilities live, work and participate in their communities on an equal basis with all British Columbians**

**Objective 3.1: Support a comprehensive and integrated system of supports and services for individuals with disabilities**

**Key Highlights**

- Increased the annualized earnings exemption maximum amounts in January 2021. For a single person with the Persons with Disabilities designation, the maximum amount of exempted income increased from \$12,000 to \$15,000, and for a family with two adults with the Persons with Disabilities designation, the maximum amount of exempted income increased from \$24,000 to \$30,000.

Performance Measure(s)	2018/19 Baseline	2019/20 Actuals	2020/21 Target	2020/21 Actuals	2021/22 Target <sup>2</sup>	2022/23 Target
3.1 Total amount of earnings exemptions reported by Persons with Disabilities cases <sup>1</sup>	\$135 million	\$149 million	\$153 million	\$129 million	\$160 million	\$168 million

Data source: Research Branch, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

<sup>1</sup> The impact of the pandemic on the labour market has reduced PWD earnings and has lowered the actuals for 2020/21.

<sup>2</sup> The target for 2021/22 was adjusted (lowered) in the 2021/22 Service Plan.

**Discussion of Results**

The results for 2020/21 did not meet the target. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the employment of disability assistance clients, causing the actual amount of earned income to be lower than predicted. Service industry jobs that disability assistance clients often work in, such as accommodation and food services, were hit especially hard by the pandemic. Also, the increased risk for a serious outcome from COVID-19, as well as reduced transportation options early in the pandemic, resulted in many disability assistance clients having to cut back on their work effort.

Government worked hard to ensure that the post-pandemic economic recovery benefits support all British Columbians, including people in receipt of income and disability assistance. Additional employment programming funding has been targeted to help disability assistance clients impacted by the pandemic find employment. This includes grants to help employers make their businesses more inclusive, funding to support individuals who are dealing with a mental or physical health impairment to safely return to work and funds to supplement CLBC-funded employment support services to assist people with disabilities who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Financial Report

### Discussion of Results

For 2020/21, the Ministry met the financial targets set out by the Ministry of Finance. The majority of the Ministry's budget supported Income Assistance which totalled \$3.23 billion in 2020/21, including the \$300 temporary monthly COVID-19 Crisis Supplement from April through December 2020 and the \$150 temporary monthly BC Recovery Supplement from January through March 2021. The Ministry's Income Assistance budget included the following four categories:

- \$600 million for Temporary Assistance.
- \$1.9 billion for Disability Assistance.
- \$568 million for supplementary assistance which includes supplements for low income seniors, medical supplies and equipment, and dental and optical care.
- \$155 million for program management (front-line staff).

Funding for Employment Programs is mostly provided by the federal government through the Labour Market Development Agreement. Federal contributions in 2020/21 totaled \$292 million while the Province spent \$28 million for employment programs and services.

Funding of over \$1.2 billion was provided for services to adults with developmental disabilities, delivered through the Ministry's service delivery crown agency, Community Living BC.

In line with government's goal of prudent fiscal management, expenditures for Executive and Support Services were limited to \$11 million.

## Financial Summary

	Estimated	Other Authorizations <sup>1</sup>	Total Estimated	Actual	Variance
<b>Operating Expenses (\$000)</b>					
Income Assistance <sup>2</sup>	2,501,257	722,160	3,223,417	3,225,683	2,266
Employment <sup>3</sup>	29,169	0	29,169	27,698	-1,471
Community Living Services <sup>4</sup>	1,139,699	76,989	1,216,688	1,216,688	0
Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal	1,837	0	1,837	1,184	-653
Executive and Support Services	10,858	0	10,858	10,759	-99
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>3,682,820</b>	<b>799,149</b>	<b>4,481,969</b>	<b>4,482,012</b>	<b>44</b>
Adjustment of Prior Year Accrual <sup>5</sup>	0	0	0	-756	-756
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,682,820</b>	<b>799,149</b>	<b>4,481,969</b>	<b>4,481,256</b>	<b>-713</b>
<b>Ministry Capital Expenditures (\$000)</b>					
<b>Executive and Support Services<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>1,449</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,449</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>-1,095</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,449</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,449</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>-1,095</b>

<sup>1</sup>“Other Authorizations” include Supplementary Estimates, Statutory Appropriations and Contingencies. Amounts in this column are not related to the “estimated amount” under sections 5(1) and 6(1) of the *Balanced Budget and Ministerial Accountability Act* for ministerial accountability for operating expenses under the Act.

<sup>2</sup>Included in total spend of \$3.23 billion on Income Assistance is approved access to \$721.5 million from Contingencies: Pandemic Response and Economic Recovery.

<sup>3</sup>Reflects WorkBC costs, net of recoveries from the federal government. Total spend in 2020/21 was \$320 million, which included \$28 million in provincial spending and \$292 million recovered from the federal government.

<sup>4</sup>Direct transfers to Community Living British Columbia (CLBC). Included in total spend of \$1.2 billion is approved access to \$33.3 million from Contingencies: Pandemic Response and Economic Recovery.

<sup>5</sup>The Adjustment of Prior Year Accrual of \$0.756 million is a reversal of accruals in the previous year.

<sup>6</sup>Capital expenditures represent replacement of vehicles. The capital budget to support WorkBC was re-profiled to future years.

## **Appendix A: Agencies, Boards, Commissions and Tribunals**

As of August 9, 2021, the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction is responsible and accountable for the following:

- Community Living BC
- Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal
- Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee

# **Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction**

## **2022/23 – 2024/25 Service Plan**

**February 2022**



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Published by the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

## Minister's Accountability Statement



The *Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction 2022/23 – 2024/25 Service Plan* was prepared under my direction in accordance with the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*. I am accountable for the basis on which the plan has been prepared.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "N. Simons".

Honourable Nicholas Simons  
Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction  
February 22, 2022

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## Purpose of the Ministry

The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (SDPR) focuses on reducing poverty, creating opportunities and increasing inclusion. The purpose of the ministry is to provide strategic leadership and quality services that empower British Columbians in need to share in the Province's prosperity, to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in their community and to reach their full potential.

SDPR is guided by five pieces of legislation: the *Accessible British Columbia Act*, the *Employment and Assistance Act*, the *Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act*, the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act*, and the *Community Living Authority Act*. The Minister is responsible for the Crown corporation Community Living BC (CLBC) and is supported by the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development and Non-Profits and the Parliamentary Secretary for Accessibility. The ministry's key responsibilities include:

- Leading development and implementation of [TogetherBC: BC's Poverty Reduction Strategy](#);
- Supporting the work of the Attorney General and Minister responsible for Housing and other government initiatives to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness in British Columbia;
- Providing income, disability and supplemental assistance to people in need;
- Creating and implementing strategies to increase food security for people in need;
- Creating a multi-sector Period Poverty Task Force to develop a long-term response to period poverty in B.C.;
- Providing an integrated system of employment programs, services and supports to all British Columbians through [WorkBC](#);
- Leading implementation of the Accessible B.C. Act with the goal to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities in B.C.;
- Working with community, business and government partners to increase accessibility, employment, independence and inclusion for individuals with disabilities;
- Working to advocate for the charitable and non-profit sector and ensure that it is engaged and supported through the COVID-19 pandemic and into recovery;
- Leading collaborative engagement through the [Social Services Sector Roundtable](#) to help strengthen the important community social services that people count on every day; and
- Through [Community Living BC](#), continue working on the [Re-imagining Community Inclusion](#) Initiative to improve services for adults with developmental disabilities and their families.

## Strategic Direction

In 2022/2023, the Government of British Columbia will continue its whole-of-government response to the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on protecting the health, social and economic well-being of British Columbians. Building on our economic, environmental, and social strengths while looking to seize opportunities to improve outcomes for all British Columbians will be an important aspect of each ministry's work as we respond to COVID-19 and recover from devastating floods and wildfires. The policies, programs and projects developed over the



course of this service plan period will align with the five foundational principles established by Government in 2020: putting people first; working toward lasting and meaningful reconciliation; supporting equity and anti-racism; ensuring a better future through fighting climate change and meeting our greenhouse gas reduction targets; and supporting a strong, sustainable economy that works for everyone.

This 2022/23 service plan outlines how the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction will support the government's priorities including the foundational principles listed above and selected action items identified in the [November 2020 Minister's Mandate Letter](#).

## **Economic Statement**

B.C.'s economy has rebounded from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020, despite significant pandemic variant and climate-related events. A strong health response, high vaccination rates, increased infrastructure investments and supports for British Columbians struggling through the pandemic has helped the province rebound. While the recovery has broadened over the past year, it remains uneven with sectors like tourism, hospitality and live recreation events not fully recovered. The path of the ongoing economic recovery in B.C. and its trading partners remains highly uncertain. However, rebuild efforts from the November 2021 floods are expected to provide some support to economic activity in the province. The Economic Forecast Council (EFC) estimates that B.C. real GDP expanded by 5.1 per cent in 2021 and expects growth of 4.2 per cent in 2022 and 2.7 per cent in 2023. Meanwhile for Canada, the EFC projects national real GDP growth of 4.1 per cent in 2022 and 2.8 per cent in 2023, following an estimated gain of 4.7 per cent in 2021. As such, B.C.'s economic growth is expected to be broadly in line with the national average in the coming years. The pandemic has increased risks to B.C.'s economic outlook, such as the emergence of further variants of concern, inflationary supply chain disruptions, extended travel restrictions, and the continued impact of the slower recovery in some sectors of the B.C. economy. Further risks include ongoing uncertainty regarding global trade policies, and lower commodity prices.

## Performance Planning

### Goal 1: Reduce Poverty in British Columbia

#### Objective 1.1: Implement the cross-government, province-wide Poverty Reduction Strategy

##### Key Strategies

- Implement [TogetherBC](#), the comprehensive, cross-government Poverty Reduction Strategy addressing key areas of need including housing, families, children and youth, education, employment, income supports, and other social supports, aiming to meet statutory targets to reduce the overall poverty rate by 25% and poverty rate of children by 50% by 2024;
- Produce an annual report on the actions taken to implement the strategy, the effects of the strategy on poverty reduction, and any progress made toward the targets in the previous calendar year;
- Engage with the Minister’s Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee, which advises the Minister on matters relating to poverty reduction and prevention;
- Create and implement initiatives to increase food security for people in need and create a multi-sectoral Period Poverty Task Force to develop a comprehensive long-term response to period poverty in B.C.; and
- Review existing government income support programs for opportunities to improve access and delivery, guided by feedback from users and the basic income panel’s recommendations as outlined in their final report [Covering all the Basics: Reforms for a More Just Society](#) (released January 28, 2021).

Performance Measure(s)	2016 Baseline	2019 Actual	2020-24 Target
1.1a Total Poverty Reduction <sup>1</sup>	15.3%	10.8%	11.5%
1.1b Child Poverty Rate <sup>1</sup>	17.0%	7.2%	8.5%

Data source: Statistics Canada. [Table 11-10-0135-01 Low-income statistics by age, sex and economic family type](#).

<sup>1</sup> The legislated targets are based on calendar years (not fiscal years) and reflect a 25% reduction in the rate of overall poverty and a 50% reduction in the rate of child poverty from 2016 data. The most recent federal data released in March 2021 provides low-income statistics for 2019.

##### Linking Performance Measure to Objective

These measures reflect the official poverty statistics produced by Statistics Canada using the current Market Basket Measure, also referred to as Canada’s Official Poverty Line. Lower poverty rates mean that government investments to help people living in low income and to improve the economy are reducing both poverty levels and rates. Monitoring poverty rates across vulnerable populations will lead to better targeting of investments and will help government achieve its poverty reduction targets.

## Discussion

The *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* sets out legislated targets for the reduction of both the overall poverty rate and the poverty rate for children by 2024. The *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* also requires annual reporting on the Strategy – including progress made towards the legislated targets. The [second annual report](#) was released on October 4, 2021.

In March 2021, the largest ever permanent rate increase to income and disability assistance was announced (\$175/month) to support the transition from temporary COVID crisis funding to recovery and permanent assistance changes. B.C. also introduced the first rate increase to the Senior's Supplement since its creation in 1987 (\$50/month) as well as a \$20/month increase to the Comforts Allowance for those on income assistance living in special care facilities.

According to the most recent federal statistics on low income, British Columbia has achieved both targets set out in the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* based on 2019 data. However, British Columbia must maintain this success to 2024 to meet the requirements as set out in the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act*. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant shock to the labour market, and the long-term impact of the pandemic on poverty rates is currently uncertain. These impacts are expected to be better understood with the release of the 2020 low-income statistics in 2022.

**Goal 2: British Columbians in need have services, supports and opportunities that make life better**

**Objective 2.1: Deliver reliable, responsive, consistent, accessible and secure income and disability assistance services**

**Key Strategies**

- Consider the diverse needs of clients to improve the quality and responsiveness of income assistance services;
- Increase community presence through expanded outreach by Community Integration Specialists, working collaboratively with community partners including expanding the use of mobile technology to support service delivery;
- Continue to expand and improve digital self-service options including usability improvements and better client accessibility;
- Regularly monitor client feedback and satisfaction to help improve services; and
- Ensure administrative fairness through the provision of an effective and efficient reconsideration and appeal system.

Performance Measure(s)	2020/21 Baseline	2021/22 Forecast	2022/23 Target	2023/24 Target	2024/25 Target
2.1 Number of clients using My Self-Serve	97,543	103,300	104,000 <sup>1</sup>	105,000 <sup>1</sup>	106, 000

Data source: Service Delivery Division, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

<sup>1</sup> The 2022/23 and 2023/24 targets have been updated from the 2021/21 Service Plan

**Linking Performance Measure to Objective**

This measure reflects the number of ministry clients using [My Self Serve](#), the ministry’s online service portal. Targets can be achieved through increased marketing and robust communication. An increase in this number means that more clients are accessing income assistance services through the most flexible and efficient means available.

**Discussion**

The ministry continued to promote My Self Serve during the pandemic and extreme weather events that occurred in 2021/2022, which resulted in more clients using this online service portal than forecasted. The ministry has updated the future year targets to reflect this higher usage in 2021/22 and continuing efforts to improve digital self-service options.

## Objective 2.2: WorkBC Employment Services clients achieve employment

### Key Strategies

- Adapt programming and service delivery to maximize access to employment services and supports for British Columbians with diverse needs while protecting the health and safety of clients and staff during the COVID-19 crisis and economic recovery;
- Provide access to training and employment supports that will increase economic opportunities;
- Work collaboratively with partner ministries, employers and employer associations to ensure ministry employment programs and supports are aligned with the needs of individuals and the changing labour market, especially sectors and employers hardest-hit by COVID-19;
- Implement awareness and information campaigns to enhance the recognition and consistent knowledge of the suite of services available through the [network of WorkBC Centres](#) across B.C.; and
- Promote awareness of the [Community and Employer Partnerships \(CEP\)](#) program to support inclusive economic recovery in B.C. communities following COVID-19, wildfires, floods and other labour market events to improve employment outcomes for unemployed British Columbians.

Performance Measure(s)	2020/21 Baseline	2021/22 Forecast	2022/23 Target	2023/24 Target	2024/25 Target
2.1 Number of clients who achieve employment <sup>1</sup>	12,900	13,500 <sup>2</sup>	20,000	24,000	28,300

Data source: Employment and Labour Market Services Division, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

<sup>1</sup> Employment is defined as a full-time job (30 or more hours/week) or a part-time job (when part-time employment is desired; less than 30 hours/week), or self-employment (business is implemented and considered operational), after WorkBC services and/or supports.

<sup>2</sup> The 2021/22 forecast has changed significantly compared to the target identified in the 2019/20 Service Plan. The original target was set with the expectation of an expeditious labour market recovery in a period of economic uncertainty.

### Linking Performance Measure to Objective

This measure captures the number of British Columbians who achieve employment after receiving services and/or supports through WorkBC Employment Services (both self-serve and case managed). Since April 1, 2019, 55% of case managed clients obtained employment after receiving case managed services by WorkBC Employment Services and at least 23% of self-serve clients obtained employment after receiving assistance through WorkBC.

### Discussion

In fiscal 2021/22 there continues to be uncertainty regarding the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the need for ongoing provincial health measures, and the resulting impacts to the labour market. Overall employment in B.C. has recovered, with the 61.4% employment rate in December 2021 just shy of the 61.7% experienced in February 2020 prior to the

pandemic. However, high-contact service industries are expected to take longer to recover and there are fewer jobs in lower skilled occupations. Over the last year employment in lower skilled occupations (requiring high school or less) was 57,000 below levels seen pre-pandemic. This creates challenges for income assistance clients as almost 75% of new starting Expected-to-Work cases have high school or less as their highest level of educational attainment.

Many unemployed individuals have been out of the labour market for an extended period of time. In December 2021, 26.4% of all unemployed in British Columbia had been unemployed for 27 or more weeks, double the rate of 12.8% in February 2020. This can lead to people needing more support and taking longer to acquire the necessary skills and experience to find new sustainable employment. In response, WorkBC adapted its strategies including expanding eligibility for services such as wage subsidy and skills enhancement.

An additional challenge is that there is a high number of job vacancies and people unemployed in B.C., indicating that there is a disconnect between employers who are wanting to hire and people wanting to work. In the third quarter of 2021 there were 158,000 job vacancies and 178,000 unemployed British Columbians. Over half of the job vacancies were in the sales and service sector and trade sectors, sectors where employment was also over 75,000 lower in December 2021 than before the recession.

Due to continued challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the remaining uncertainty on the timing of recovery for some sectors, the targets for 2022/23 and 2023/24 have been adjusted to reflect a gradual return to pre-pandemic expectations. Targets are based on a blended forecast of future caseloads, historical trends of achieving employment, service duration and labour market changes. Adjustments are a result of the economic disruption, changes in Employment Insurance recipient caseloads, BC Employment and Assistance referral and acceptance rates, and current labour market conditions.

### Goal 3: Individuals with disabilities live, work and participate in their communities on an equal basis with all British Columbians

#### Objective 3.1: Support a comprehensive and integrated system of supports and services for individuals with disabilities

##### Key Strategies

- Provide adults with disabilities access to responsive services that support them in participating as full citizens and in achieving improved outcomes;
- Continue to work with people with disabilities and their families, community stakeholders, public organizations and the business community to develop solutions and strategies that improve the lives of people with disabilities in British Columbia and engage stakeholders and the public to identify barriers and solutions to improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities;
- Support the Re-imagining Community Inclusion (RCI) Steering Committee in implementing the work plan in response to the [10-Year Re-imagining Community Inclusion Roadmap](#) to help improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities;
- Monitor and support the transition process for youth with special needs, who are entering adulthood, to ensure they access the ministry’s disability assistance program and the adult community living services offered through Community Living BC; and
- Support the implementation of the [Accessible British Columbia Act](#) to ensure people with disabilities can meaningfully participate in their communities, including in employment.

Performance Measure(s)	2020/21 Baseline	2021/22 Forecast	2022/23 Target	2023/24 Target	2024/25 Target
3.1a Total amount of earnings exemptions reported by Persons with Disabilities cases	\$129 million	\$150 million	\$168 million	\$170 million	\$173 million

Data source: Research Branch, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

##### Linking Performance Measure to Objective

Employment provides meaningful participation and inclusion, as well as the ability for the Ministry’s Persons with Disabilities clients to take advantage of earnings exemptions and increase their total income. An increase in the total amount of exempted earnings reported by these clients is an indicator that both participation in employment and incomes have improved.

##### Discussion

COVID-19 resulted in a significant economic downturn early in the pandemic but improvements in the economy have returned employment to pre-pandemic levels in many sectors. Additional funding provided for employment opportunities for Persons with Disabilities as a part of [StrongerBC](#), B.C.’s Economic Recovery Plan, has helped many people impacted by the downturn to return to employment. However, the service sector continues to experience challenges, and this sector is a main employer for people on income and disability assistance.

While the improvement in the labour market has contributed to increased earnings and exempted amounts for Persons with Disabilities, some of the growth experienced in 2021/22 is the result of the increase in earnings exemptions. For a single person, the annualized earnings exemption was increased from \$12,000 to \$15,000 per year.



## Financial Summary

Core Business Area	2021/22 Restated Estimates <sup>1</sup>	2022/23 Estimates	2023/24 Plan	2024/25 Plan
<b>Operating Expenses (\$000)</b>				
Income Assistance	3,027,205	3,079,080	3,093,986	3,109,577
Employment	29,169	29,169	29,169	29,169
Community Living Services	1,290,394	1,333,102	1,352,549	1,357,549
Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal	1,849	1,849	1,849	1,849
Executive and Support Services	11,817	12,833	12,550	12,802
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,360,434</b>	<b>4,456,033</b>	<b>4,490,103</b>	<b>4,510,946</b>
<b>Ministry Capital Expenditures (Consolidated Revenue Fund) (\$000)</b>				
Executive and Support Services	2,313	1,822	1,555	1,555
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,313</b>	<b>1,822</b>	<b>1,555</b>	<b>1,555</b>

<sup>1</sup> For comparative purposes, amounts shown for 2021/22 have been restated to be consistent with the presentation of the 2022/23 Estimates.

\* Further information on program funding and vote recoveries is available in the [Estimates and Supplement to the Estimates](#).

