

Position Statement

The Right of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to Parent

Technical Version

Adopted January 2026

Introduction

Inclusion BC and the Aboriginal Housing Management Association collaborated to write this position statement. These two organizations and their members have come together around a commitment to advance human rights and social inclusion for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

For decades, government policies and societal actions have harmed people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our position statement strives to challenge ableist, racist, ageist, and colonial views about people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our goal is to promote the inclusion of all members of the community regardless of income, ethnicity, background, culture, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, and disability.

We recognize and support the inherent Indigenous rights and titles throughout the province of British Columbia, the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the 94 Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

Position Statement

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the right to raise children in safe, supportive environments. Governments at all levels must ensure that parents with disabilities have access to the disability-related supports and services necessary to maintain a good quality of life for themselves and their families.

Everyone should have access to the resources and supports needed to parent in ways that benefit both children and parents. Parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities should not face discrimination when pursuing alternative paths to parenthood. They must have equitable access to support across the many ways people can become parents.

Community-based supports and services should be person-centred, culturally safe, and culturally appropriate, with a strong focus on family preservation. Families should never be separated due to a lack of available supports in their communities. Indigenous people with intellectual and developmental disabilities require additional consideration, as they often face compounded barriers rooted in ongoing colonialism within existing support systems.

To skip the background and rights-based section and move directly to the calls to action, [click here](#).

Background

It is important to acknowledge the historical harms experienced by people with disabilities during the height of the eugenics movement. In 1933, the British Columbia government enacted the *Sexual Sterilization Act*, establishing the BC Eugenics Board to approve the sterilization of individuals deemed “unfit” to procreate, primarily impacting people with intellectual disabilities. Due to the destruction of records, the exact number of those impacted is unknown, though estimates range from 200 to 400 people.

Although the Act was repealed in 1973, sterilizations continued with parental or guardian consent until the [Eve decision](#). In 1986, the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed in *Eve* that people with intellectual disabilities have the same rights to bodily autonomy and decision-making as others, rejecting non-consensual sterilization. This landmark ruling reinforced that disability alone cannot justify restricting reproductive choice or the right to parent.

Following the repeal of the *Sexual Sterilization Act*, the *Eve* decision, and the closure of BC's largest institution in 1996, several parenting support programs for parents with disabilities emerged in the province. Over time, all but one were discontinued, with limited documentation explaining these endings. Previously, formal planning

processes existed to coordinate supports across the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Ministry of Health, Community Living BC, and community organizations. These processes no longer exist, creating a significant policy and practice gap in supporting parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Today, community organizations continue to support parents receiving Community Living BC-funded services, often relying on local leadership and creative problem-solving rather than legislation, policy or coordinated systems. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities consistently emphasize the need for parenting supports to be introduced earlier, as well as the importance of cultural safety across all service providers, regardless of the ministry.

The limited availability of inclusive, culturally safe, person-centred parenting programs reflects longstanding neglect of the rights and well-being of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and perpetuates historical harms. Indigenous parents are particularly affected. This is due to the impacts of ongoing colonialism and intergenerational trauma from policies such as residential schools and the Sixties Scoop, which result in additional intersecting barriers. Addressing these inequities requires an intersectional approach to supporting parenting.

Indigenous cultures have unique beliefs and ways of raising children that must be respected. Parenting supports and services should include and honour cultural practices so that Indigenous people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can parent in a way that matches their worldview.

Rights of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

The rights of parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities are protected under several international human rights instruments.

In 2010, Canada ratified the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).¹ [Article 23](#) says that States Parties should provide appropriate assistance to persons with disabilities to support their child-rearing responsibilities and must

¹ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), online: <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>

take effective measures to eliminate discrimination in areas related to marriage, family, **parenthood**, and relationships, ensuring equal rights and opportunities by:

- Recognizing their right to decide how many children they want and when to have them.
- Providing access to information and reproductive and family planning education.
- Providing the means necessary to enable people to exercise these rights.

It also says, **“in no case shall a child be separated from parents on the basis of a disability of either the child or one or both of the parents.”**

On June 21, 2021, the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) received royal assent in Canada, mandating the government to align Canadian laws with the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

This Declaration recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples to be protected from violence, including being forced to have their children taken away. The rights and needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children, and persons with disabilities should receive particular attention. Additionally, the government has an obligation to take measures with Indigenous peoples to ensure that Indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination. Solutions for Indigenous parents with disabilities must be Indigenous-led and holistic, supporting the whole family system as well as the individual.²

In its [2025 concluding observations on Canada's combined second and third periodic reports](#), the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expressed concern with the lack of support provided to parents with disabilities, especially in First Nations, Inuit and Métis territories. The Committee recommended that Canada recognize the legal capacity of persons with disabilities to ensure their right to raise children. The Committee also recommended that Canada adopt policy measures to ensure adequate support for parents with disabilities and to prevent the

² The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, online: [UNDRIP_E_web.pdf](#) at Article 7, 21, and 22.

separation of children from their families based on disability, including in First Nations, Inuit and Métis territories.³

While federal and provincial human rights codes offer some protections against discrimination, there are still gaps in ensuring fair access to parenting opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. BC currently lacks comprehensive legislation explicitly protecting the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to parent.

The fundamental human right to family life is at the heart of this issue, including the right to raise children in a supportive and safe environment. As stated in the UN [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), it is in the child's best interest to remain with their family. However, there are key barriers significantly impacting these rights, including negative attitudes, inadequate support services, health disparities, and a lack of accessible housing.

Supports and Services: Bridging the Gap

This next section summarizes the key barriers identified by Inclusion BC and the Aboriginal Housing Management Association in supporting parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This is not a complete list, but it does represent our best understanding of the gaps in the current system of supports and services.

Ableism and Discrimination

A [2025 Scoping Review](#) identified ableism as a significant barrier for parents with intellectual disabilities. The report echoes the experiences of the people we support. The findings show that these parents may face a higher risk of intrusive child protection interventions than parents without these disabilities, including child apprehension. Supports and systems that fail to account for the needs and lived experiences of people with disabilities constitute a form of institutional ableism.

³ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2025), Concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Canada, online: tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=4&CountryID=31&DocTypeID=5

The report identifies two key contributors to child apprehension:

- Negative attitudes and stigma toward intellectual disabilities within child welfare systems.
- Inadequate access to early parenting supports.

Parents described child welfare processes as “discriminatory, inaccessible, and distressing.”⁴ Many reported that their needs were overlooked, that they were not informed of their legal rights, or that they did not receive the necessary support to navigate the court system. Parents also frequently encountered child welfare workers and legal professionals who lacked an understanding of intellectual disabilities.⁵

Training is needed across sectors to address bias and stigma toward parents with disabilities. It needs to build empathy and strengthen practical skills for providing accessible and appropriate parenting supports. This training should:

- Focus on parents' strengths and abilities.
- Be culturally safe and appropriate.
- Correct common misconceptions about disability and parenting.
- Improve coordination across services to reduce barriers and ensure families receive the supports and services they need to thrive.

The legal barriers faced by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are examined in greater detail in the [*Position Statement on Access to Justice for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*](#).

⁴ Morris, R., Walsh, L., Goos, M., Lomness, A. and Hole, R. (2026), Parenting Experiences Among Adults with Intellectual Disabilities: A Scoping Review. British Journal of Learning Disabilities. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bld.70009> at 8

⁵ Ibid.

Income Security

People with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty as people without disabilities.⁶ The [2024 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada](#) highlights how poverty directly contributes to child apprehension, particularly for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, who experience disproportionately high poverty rates, racism, and discrimination, and for whom poverty is often perceived as neglect rather than a systemic issue.

Based on current provincial Persons with Disability (PWD) [monthly benefit rates](#), families of four where one parent receives PWD benefits fall \$28,575.00 below the poverty line.⁷ Families with both parents receiving PWD fall \$22,875.00 below the poverty line. In July 2025, the Canada Disability Benefit began providing \$200 a month, or approximately \$6.00 per day, for some parents with disabilities. However, even when combined, federal and provincial benefit amounts do not lift people to the poverty line⁸ and family income thresholds reduce these benefits. Additionally, the Canada Disability Benefit requires a valid Disability Tax Credit certificate, which creates an additional barrier.

Governments must provide access to Persons with Disability (PWD) benefits that guarantee rates that at least lift people to the poverty line and are indexed to inflation, with the ultimate goal of securing a livable income. Additionally, people should have access to child care and to safe, affordable, and accessible housing.

Although this position statement makes no direct calls to action regarding access to income security, it is a significant contributor to parenting barriers. We examine this issue in greater detail in the [Position Statement on Income Security for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#).

⁶ Disability Poverty in Canada a 2023 Report Card, online: https://campaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/DWP-Report-Card-23-FINAL_compressed-English.pdf.

⁷ According to Statistics Canada's 2023 Market Basket Measure for a family of four, the poverty line in most of the province is \$56,397.00, online: [Market Basket Measure \(MBM\) thresholds for the reference family by Market Basket Measure region, component and base year \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

⁸ 2024 Disability Poverty Report Card, online: [FINAL-Disability-Poverty-Report-Card-English_compressed.pdf](#)

Health Disparities

In researching this position statement, we discovered that data collection and research on parenting with a disability were minimal. Our understanding was strengthened by [research](#) by Marquis et al., which shows strong evidence that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience health disparities. These disadvantages result from various inequities, including in healthcare systems. For example, people, including parents, often have negative hospital experiences, limited access to reproductive health care, and a wide range of poor health outcomes. These inequities stem from inadequate training for physicians and other healthcare providers, as well as harmful narratives in healthcare research and policy.⁹ We discuss these barriers further in the [Position Statement on Access to Health and Coordinated Care for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#).

In recent focus groups, parents have shared their negative experiences with early parenting classes offered in community health settings. Access to health care and early parenting support is central to enabling people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to parent effectively and thrive. This includes access to a systems navigator to help them identify supports, follow processes, and ask questions in a safe space. These services must cover various needs, including:

- Accessible health care.
- Accessible reproductive health care.
- Parenting education tailored to different abilities and learning styles.

Housing

Accessible and affordable housing remains a significant barrier for many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in BC. The lack of universally designed housing options makes it challenging for people with disabilities to find suitable homes that meet their needs as parents. Issues include safety risks for both parents and children. According to the [First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society](#), 65% of parents with a disability in BC report experiencing discrimination when attempting to

⁹ Marquis S, O'Leary R, Bandara NA, Baumbusch J., Health policy narratives contributing to health inequities experienced by people with intellectual/developmental disabilities: New evidence from COVID-19. *Clinical Ethics*. 2024;19(1):54-61, doi:[10.1177/14777509231196704](https://doi.org/10.1177/14777509231196704)

secure housing.¹⁰ This is due to landlords refusing to rent to people on Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefits, who are unable to work.

Parents express that when they have their right to housing denied, their greatest fear is that their child(ren) might be apprehended. Indigenous parents (72%) and parents with a disability (69%) are more likely to have this fear when compared to other parents, and may avoid seeking support as a result.¹¹ It is important to recognize that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples living with disabilities face additional barriers when trying to parent and access safe housing. Colonialism, displacement, the forcible removal of children from their families, and widespread generational trauma, all contribute significantly to the disproportionate rates of homelessness and negative health outcomes experienced by Indigenous populations across Canada. Solutions must take an intersectional approach to address the unique challenges faced by Indigenous parents and communities.

The government must prioritize accessible, affordable housing initiatives that can seamlessly accommodate supports for parenting with a disability to eliminate the fear of asking for support. This must be foundational to any parenting support program. While this position statement makes no direct calls to action regarding housing, it is a significant challenge for parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We will examine this issue in greater detail in the upcoming *Position Statement on Access to Housing for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*.

Supports and Services

Access to supports and services should be available in all regions of BC, including rural and remote areas. This would ensure that all prospective and current parents with disabilities have the tools and assistance necessary to navigate parenthood successfully.

To further strengthen this approach, parenting programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities need to be designed with people with these

¹⁰ First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society (2023), A Failure to Protect: The Denial of Children's Right to Housing in British Columbia, online: <https://firstcallbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/First-Call-Housing-Report-2023.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid.

disabilities because they are the experts in their own lives and parenting experiences. When programs are co-designed, they are more likely to reflect real needs, strengths, and challenges, rather than assumptions or stereotypes. This approach helps:

- Ensure supports are accessible, respectful, and practical.
- Build trust.
- Increase the possibility that parents will engage with and benefit from programs.

Designing programs with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities also upholds their rights, promotes dignity and self-determination. This leads to more effective, coordinated supports that strengthen families and improve outcomes for both parents and children.

The range of supports and services needed across the province is detailed in the [*Position Statement on Access to Disability Supports and Services for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*](#).

Calls to Action

To make sure people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can exercise their right to be parents, and because children should stay with their parents whenever it is safe, we call on the provincial government to take the following actions:

Clear Policy and Specific Funding

- Create **provincial legislation and policy** that clearly states that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the right to be parents and to get the supports and housing they need.
- Provide **ongoing funding for parenting support programs** developed to meet the needs of parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These programs should be culturally safe and shaped by the real-life experiences of parents, including Indigenous parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

- Ensure **collaboration** between government ministries, community organizations, Indigenous-led services, and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to create and run parenting support programs.
- Decision-making around child apprehension must include **professionals with specific expertise and experience** supporting parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Oversight and Data Collection

- Create a **province-wide system to collect information** about the experiences and needs of parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- **Include parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities** when deciding what information to collect and how to use it. This will help ensure the information is fair and valued, and that it is used respectfully.
- **Use this information to improve policies and services**, and to make sure parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities get the support they need to raise their children.

Address Attitudinal Barriers

- Make **disability awareness training** mandatory for people working in healthcare, social services, housing, community services, first responder roles, and the justice system.
- **Co-design training** with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to ensure it teaches respect, human rights, and culturally safe ways of supporting parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including Indigenous parents

The right of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to parent is not just a matter of legal protection but also social justice and human dignity. The province of BC can be a leader by taking proactive measures to address existing issues and gaps. This would promote the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to parent and set a standard for other provinces and nations to follow in pursuing equality and social justice. We can build a future where

every person can realize their right to parenthood with dignity and support. This requires collaborative efforts, informed policies, funding, and steadfast commitment.