

BULLETIN

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BC government launches mental health and addiction services roadmap; includes a focus on early years mental health services

This morning Premier John Horgan and Minister of Mental Health and Addiction Services Judy Darcy launched *The Pathway to Hope* - a ten-year roadmap aimed at better supporting people and families experiencing mental health and addiction challenges. Among a number of initiatives, the plan includes enhanced access to counselling, more Foundry centres, child and youth teams connected to schools, and expanding First Nation-run treatment centres.

One area of focus is early childhood social emotional development, and enhancing and expanding early intervention services and programs in child development centres and community-based organizations.

HSA has long advocated for the introduction of early years mental health services. The foundation for sound mental health is built in the earliest years of life, when a child develops capacities for learning and relating to others. Anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, and aggression in the pre-school years can have a significant negative effect on social and psychological development.

We know that mental health services are most effective when provided early, and when integrated with other services provided to children with special needs, such as the multidisciplinary, team-based care that Child Development Centres (CDCs) provide. CDCs are an important avenue for providing the full range of mental health supports required by children and their families.

“We are excited to see this work reflected in today’s announcement. I want to thank our members who are such strong advocates for children and their families, and the HSA members of our Constituency Liaison program who have been working on raising this issue with their MLAs for many years. Your work makes a difference,” said HSA President Val Avery, who was on hand for the announcement.

“We are looking forward to learning more about the implementation of the plan and working with the government to ensure it is meeting the needs of children and families,” she said.

You can read the government’s full plan here: https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/BCMentalHealthRoadmap_2019.pdf

A quick summary from the press release outlines the priority areas of the initial three-year plan:

- **Increasing access to affordable counselling and support:** expanding sliding scale and no-cost community counselling services with \$10 million in grants to non-profits. This will expand affordable access for people, especially those without extended health coverage and those facing barriers related to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, social class and/or sexual orientation.
- **Launching integrated child and youth teams connected to schools:** establishing multi-disciplinary teams in five school districts over the next two years to bring wraparound services and supports directly to young people where they feel safe and comfortable, so families and caregivers do not have to navigate a system on their own.
- **Opening more Foundry centres:** increasing the number of Foundry youth centres from 11 to 19, so that young people in more communities can access these “one-stop shops” for health and wellness resources, services and supports.
- **Expanding First Nations-run treatment centres:** supporting the construction of two new urban treatment centres and renovations to a number of existing centres providing culturally safe access to substance use services.
- **Expanding intensive services for children and youth:** establishing two new intensive day programs for children and youth with severe mental health and/or substance use challenges transitioning out of hospital care, and 20 new family care home spaces with clinical care as an alternative to hospitalization.
- **Supporting early childhood social emotional development:** enhancing and expanding early intervention services and programs in child development centres and community-based organizations, and launching new professional development tools and educational resources to support service providers and caregivers of children under six years of age.