

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

REPORT ON THE BUDGET 2021 CONSULTATION - VOLUME I



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

AUGUST 2020

**FIFTH SESSION
OF THE 41ST PARLIAMENT**



August 21, 2020

To the Honourable
Legislative Assembly of the
Province of British Columbia

Honourable Members:

I have the honour to present herewith the Second Report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for the Fifth Session of the 41st Parliament.

The report covers the work of the Committee in regard to the Budget 2021 Consultation, and was unanimously approved by the Committee.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Committee,

Bob D'Eith, MLA
Chair

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Composition of the Committee

Members

Bob D’Eith, MLA	Chair	Maple Ridge-Mission
Doug Clovechok, MLA	Deputy Chair	Columbia River-Revelstoke
Rich Coleman		Langley East
Donna Barnett, MLA		Cariboo-Chilcotin
Mitzi Dean, MLA		Esquimalt-Metchosin
Ronna-Rae Leonard, MLA		Courtenay-Comox
Nicholas Simons, MLA		Powell River-Sunshine Coast

Committee Staff

Susan Sourial, Clerk Assistant, Committees and Interparliamentary Relations

Karan Riarh, Senior Research Analyst

Katey Stickle, Natalie Beaton and Jesse Gordon, Committee Researchers

Terms of Reference

On February 18, 2020, the Legislative Assembly agreed that the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services be empowered to:

Examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to the budget consultation paper prepared by the Minister of Finance in accordance with section 2 of the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act* (S.B.C. 2000, c. 23) and, in particular, to:

- a) Conduct public consultations across British Columbia on proposals and recommendations regarding the provincial budget and fiscal policy for the coming fiscal year by any means the Committee considers appropriate; and
- b) Prepare a report no later than November 15, 2020, on the results of those consultations.

That the Committee be empowered to consider and make recommendations on the annual reports, rolling three-year service plans and budgets of the statutory officers, namely, the:

- i. Auditor General
- ii. Chief Electoral Officer
- iii. Conflict of Interest Commissioner
- iv. Human Rights Commissioner
- v. Information and Privacy Commissioner
- vi. Merit Commissioner
- vii. Ombudsperson
- viii. Police Complaint Commissioner
- ix. Representative for Children and Youth

and that the Committee be empowered to inquire into and make recommendations with respect to other matters brought to the Committee's attention by any of aforementioned statutory officers.

That the Committee be designated as the Committee referred to in sections 19, 20, 21 and 23 of the *Auditor General Act* (R.S.B.C. 2003, c. 2) and that the report in section 22 of the *Auditor General Act* (R.S.B.C. 2003, c. 2) be referred to the Committee.

In addition to the powers previously conferred upon the Select Standing Committees of the House, the Committee be empowered to:

- a. Appoint of its number one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee and to delegate to the subcommittees all or any of its powers except the power to report directly to the House;

- B. Sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;
- C. Conduct consultations by any means the Committee considers appropriate;
- D. Adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
- E. Retain personnel as required to assist the Committee;

and shall report to the House as soon as possible, or following any adjournment, or at the next following Session, as the case may be; to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on British Columbians and the world. We have all had to pivot and adapt to a new normal as we collectively try to minimize the spread of this disease. The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services extends its sincere appreciation to all British Columbians for their efforts and their resiliency in responding to this pandemic. We especially recognize the efforts of all front-line workers and their dedication and work in keeping us safe and ensuring British Columbians receive critical supports and services during this crisis.

The extraordinary impact of the pandemic is evident in much of the input received during this year's budget consultation. While the focus of the consultation is next year's budget, the need for nearer term emergency and recovery supports, and uncertainty and anxiety about the coming weeks and months, are still very much at the forefront. We recognize that recovery requires continued short-term measures and long-term investments with ongoing engagement and consultation with British Columbians, particularly with individuals who have been disproportionately impacted and sectors who have been severely hit.

Of particular concern is the depth of inequity and gaps in programs and services revealed by the pandemic, and the risk of exacerbating those inequities and gaps. British Columbians highlighted how emergency programs and services, recovery strategies, the coming budget, and future budgets present an opportunity to ensure meaningful investments to make progress on these issues. By doing so, we can emerge from the pandemic as a stronger, sustainable, and more equitable province.

Executive Summary

The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services (the “Committee”) is mandated by the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia to conduct an annual budget consultation. This year’s consultation was held in June with the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic very much front of mind. By the closing date of June 26, the Committee heard 281 presentations, received 1,362 written and video submissions, and received 3,625 responses to an online survey – the highest level of participation in nearly 10 years. British Columbians shared how the pandemic affected their families, their work, and their communities, and the need for supports in the coming weeks, months, and years.

This report summarizes the results of the consultation, including input shared by British Columbians and the Committee’s 124 recommendations for Budget 2021. The report begins with a discussion on equity and inclusion in recognition of how this theme was highlighted across many sectors and policy areas, particularly with respect to the pandemic. Themes thereafter are presented alphabetically; the numbering of recommendations does not indicate priority.

Committee Members recognize that the upcoming budget presents a critical opportunity to address inequities and make significant progress on reconciliation, diversity and inclusion, and accessibility. They recommend sufficient resources to continue work on implementing the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. They also recommend ensuring ministries adopt a diversity and inclusion lens and recognize systemic barriers to address the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic, and providing programs and supports for equity-seeking groups who face systemic barriers, as well as strengthening public construction policies to require new public construction projects to meaningfully meet accessibility best practices and standards.

Inequities related to digital infrastructure are another key issue. As British Columbians shifted to an online environment, the pandemic exposed gaps and barriers related to broadband access and affordability of internet services, especially in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. The Committee acknowledges how essential digital connectivity is to individual, social, and economic resiliency, especially in the current environment, and recommends accelerating investments in extending and strengthening digital infrastructure, including addressing challenges related to affordability.

Committee Members also highlight the need to provide urgent recovery funding and multi-year stabilization to several sectors. They recommend health and social services not-for-profit and charitable organizations be provided with emergency support, as well as providing incentives to British Columbians to donate, in acknowledgement of the essential services they provide to British Columbians. For the tourism sector, the Committee emphasizes the importance of supports being accessible and flexible, and notes opportunities to invest in infrastructure, destination development, and marketing, as well as incent British Columbians to be visitors in their own province. The Committee also recommends targeted, multi-year recovery, along with donation incentives, tax breaks and infrastructure investments, for the arts and culture sector which has experienced significant challenges.

With respect to broader COVID-19 related recovery, the Committee recommends continuing to work with the federal government on federal and provincial programs and measures to support British Columbians as well as transitioning emergency funding to provide targeted recovery and financial relief based on need. Committee Members also recognize financial challenges related to the pandemic and vulnerabilities in the financing structure for local governments and recommend municipal finance reform. The importance of embedding economic reconciliation in recovery is also highlighted. They additionally identify opportunities to temporarily adjust the employer health tax with a view to supporting businesses during the pandemic.

The Committee recommends BC's budgetary and taxation framework be prudent and responsive, support competitiveness, and proactively incorporate an equity lens, to address short- and long-term challenges. Investments in a variety of public infrastructure projects is also supported. Other areas of interest related to fiscal and regulatory policy include co-operatives, prompt payment legislation, luxury tax thresholds, property tax structure, and provincial sales tax (PST) non-compliance. Committee Members also support extending the ability of restaurants, bars, and tourism operators to purchase liquor at wholesale prices.

As it relates to advanced education, the Committee recognizes financial pressures facing post-secondary institutions as a result of the pandemic and recommends exploring mechanisms to provide short-term financial flexibility. Committee Members also see opportunities to make increased investments in the sector to facilitate economic recovery, including by expanding seats, providing flexible reskilling and upskilling opportunities, providing supports for the online delivery of courses, addressing direct and indirect financial barriers to education, and providing additional funding and resources for community literacy and adult education. They additionally recommend supporting post-secondary institutions with advancing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Other recommendations relate to capital funding, an international student post-secondary education strategy, and the BC Graduate Scholarship.

In addition to recovery funding for the arts and culture sector, Committee Members make recommendations to increase funding for Creative BC and Amplify BC. Maintaining existing film and production tax credits and renewing the book publishing tax is also supported. As well, the Committee recommends exploring measures, such as hiring tax credits, to address inequities and barriers for underrepresented groups. Libraries are another area of interest with recommendations to provide sustainable and reliable increases in funding and to promote reconciliation programs in libraries.

Food security and production emerged as keys area for action with respect to agriculture. Committee Members recommend supporting local food production, processing and distribution hubs, as well as implementing policies that support agricultural productivity and regional production. The Committee also highlights the importance of investing in infrastructure and innovation and reviewing risk management supports to help farmers and ranchers manage and adapt to crises. Other recommendations relate to investments in processing facilities and capacity, a multi-year extension to the Tree Fruit Replant program, and investments in the protection of domestic animals, livestock, and wildlife.

The Committee also makes several recommendations with respect to other natural resources, including encouraging adaptation and innovation and exploring market and product diversification in the forestry sector. With respect to mining, Committee Members recommend examining enhancements to the mining exploration and the mining flow-through share tax credits. Increased funding for the British Columbia Geological Survey and Geoscience BC is also supported. Additional areas for investment with respect

to economic development include supporting BC's aerospace industry and regional airports, supporting growth and innovation in science and technology, improving recruitment, training and retraining of a skilled workforce, and supporting rural development with funding to community organizations.

As it relates to the environment, Committee Members note opportunities to invest in climate change adaptation and resilience to ensure a sustainable recovery. They support continued investments in CleanBC and clean energy solutions, including reducing vehicle emissions and adopting a climate lens for all infrastructure spending. The Committee also recommends expanding and enhancing energy retrofit programs and working towards electrification in collaboration with industry. Other areas of interest include: funding for fish and wildlife conservation, management, and data collection; invasive species education, prevention, monitoring, response, and enforcement; water sustainability; and biodiversity. Committee Members additionally recommend increased funding for BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC.

The importance of expanding and accelerating digital health infrastructure to improve access to health care is highlighted with Committee Members noting the increased use of and need for digital health solutions during the pandemic. Long-term care, and how the pandemic exposed significant gaps, is another point of focus. The Committee recommends sustaining investments in this regard, particularly with respect to staffing and care standards, as well as investing in home supports. Committee Members also favour continued investments in a continuum of mental health and addiction services, and team-based primary care models. Other recommendations in health care relate to supports and services for British Columbians with chronic and complex diseases, dental care, health human resources, pharmacare, health research, reproductive health, maternal care, wellness, and surgical capacity. The Committee additionally highlights opportunities to improve decision-making and service provision for health care delivery in rural and remote communities.

With respect to housing, Committee Members recommend accelerating the building of a continuum of supportive and affordable housing across the province, as well as working with the federal government on housing for Indigenous peoples. The Committee also recommends working with local governments to streamline the development approval process to address delays and accelerate housing supply. Reviewing the property transfer tax thresholds to reflect current housing prices is another area of interest.

Ensuring the safety of students and staff in K-12 education, as well as ensuring families and students have access to technology for remote learning, is highlighted by Committee Members. They also recommend fully funding the new curriculum and providing a broad suite of programs to support all students. The Committee expresses support for developing new curriculums that recognize diversity and systemic racism, along with corresponding training and resources for staff and school administrators. Other areas for increased investment in K-12 education include funding for students with special needs and mental health supports. Committee Members additionally recommend encouraging coordination and collaboration between school districts, community partners, parents, caregivers, and volunteers to support the development of school food programs.

The Committee makes several recommendations with respect to public safety and justice, including increasing investments in legal aid services, community restorative justice programs, and digital transformation of court services. Committee Members also recommend specific investments in Indigenous justice programs and services, including ensuring a distinction-based approach for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. They again emphasize the need to invest in prevention, mitigation, adaptation, response, and recovery for wildfire, flood, and climate-related natural disasters. The importance of creating a comprehensive, distinction-based emergency response, as well as funding for prevention, intervention, and recovery programs for people-

facing gender-based violence is also highlighted. The Committee additionally makes recommendations related to child and youth advocacy centres, and programs and services for individual who engage in sex work. Other areas of interest include correctional services and ground disturbance.

Child care is a key focus in social services as the Committee recognizes its importance for economic recovery and enabling parents and caregivers, especially women, to return to work. Committee Members also recommend funding to reduce wait times and improve access to assessments, therapies, programs, and supports for children and youth with special needs and their families. Youth is another point of focus with the Committee recommending improvements in supports for youth aging out of care as well as wrap-around programs and services for vulnerable youth. Committee Members also support developing a comprehensive, outcome-focused social policy framework and continuing to fund and support the provincial poverty reduction strategy along with reviewing the framework for income and disability assistance to ensure equitability and appropriate consideration of individual circumstances. Other recommendations relate to increased funding to Community Living BC, and investment in a comprehensive program for assistive devices and medical equipment for people with disabilities.

With respect to transportation and transit, Committee Members recommend increasing and expanding HandyDART services as well as fully funding the provincial active transportation strategy, noting the increased use of active transportation during the pandemic. They also support strengthening funding models and addressing transit gaps in rural and remote communities, and accelerating the deployment of electric buses, as well as working with local governments and transit authorities to explore new pricing mechanisms to help make public transit more accessible for youth and low-income families.

Consultation Overview

Background

The *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*, S.B.C. 2000, c. 23, requires the Minister of Finance to make public a budget consultation paper, including a fiscal forecast, key issues to be addressed in the next budget, and information on how British Columbians may provide their views on those issues, no later than September 15 each year. The paper is referred to a select standing committee of the Legislative Assembly which must conduct a consultation and report on the results of that consultation no later than November 15. The Legislative Assembly assigns this responsibility to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, one of 10 permanent parliamentary committees established to undertake business on behalf of the Legislative Assembly.

Last year, the Minister of Finance released the budget consultation paper earlier in the spring, and the public consultation took place in June to enable the Committee to deliver a final report to the Legislative Assembly in August, leaving more time for review and consideration of the Committee's recommendations. Following review and feedback on the adjusted timeline, the Committee, in consultation with the Minister of Finance, opted to once again have the consultation take place in the summer.

Budget Consultation Paper

The *Budget 2021 Consultation Paper* described the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on BC's economy as well as on individuals and businesses. The paper also outlined BC's response to the pandemic, including initiatives with respect to health care, housing affordability, child care, education, and reconciliation. Input was requested on the following questions:

1. What are your top three priorities to help make life better for you, your family and your community as we come through COVID-19?
2. Aside from the immediate need to keep people healthy and safe through the COVID-19 pandemic, what actions should government prioritize to help strengthen B.C.'s economy?
3. If you had one dollar to put toward programs and services across government, how would you choose to divide it?
4. Given the ongoing demand for government programs, supports and services, how would you like to see your government continue to pay for them?

British Columbians were invited to respond to these questions through an online survey. Survey results are referenced throughout the report with a full summary in Appendix A. See *Consultation Process* for more information.

Minister of Finance Briefing

On June 1, 2020, the Minister of Finance, Hon. Carole James, MLA, appeared before the Committee to present the *Budget 2021 Consultation Paper*. The Minister recognized the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on British Columbia since the budget was tabled in February and emphasized the value of hearing from British Columbians first-hand in this unprecedented time.

The Minister outlined the province's COVID-19 action plan, which is guided by three priorities: the health and safety of British Columbians; immediate supports for individuals; and business and economic recovery. Included in the plan is \$5 billion in income supports, tax relief, and direct funding for people, businesses and services. She noted that of the \$5 billion, \$1.5 billion has been set aside for economic recovery and has not yet been allocated.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the economy and the provincial budget, the Minister informed the Committee that many priorities remain the same. This includes investing in K-12 education, child care, advanced education and skills training, and infrastructure such as new roads, hospitals and schools. The Minister explained these investments will be vital for BC's economic recovery.

The Minister recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic is a unique challenge that has hit all sectors and demographics and the discussion around BC's economic recovery will be ongoing in order to determine where the funds and initiatives are best allocated.

Consultation Process

As in previous years, the Committee used various approaches to encourage participation in the consultation, including reaching out directly to schools, Indigenous organizations and communities, and community-based groups. In addition, the Committee issued provincial and regional media releases, advertised on the radio, and placed advertisements in provincial, local and multicultural newspapers. Due to the pandemic, the Committee also increased use of online advertising, including promoting the consultation on the Legislative Assembly's social media accounts, creating promotional materials for stakeholders to download from the Committee's website, and advertising in online community calendars.

Typically, the Committee travels around the province to gather input from British Columbians at public hearings; this year, however, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, all public hearings were conducted via video- and tele-conference using the Zoom videoconferencing platform. The public hearing format was also adjusted to organize presentations thematically with presenters grouped into panels based on topics of interest identified in a pre-registration process.

In addition to participating in one of 17 remote public hearings, British Columbians also had the option to provide a written, audio, or video submission or to complete an online survey comprised of the questions in the *Budget 2021 Consultation Paper*. In total, the Committee heard 281 presentations, received 1,362 written and video submissions, and received 3,625 survey responses - this is the highest level of participation in nearly 10 years. The Committee made every effort to accommodate all those interested in presenting at a public hearing; however, due to the high level of interest, some individuals and organizations were encouraged to participate in other formats. Committee Members carefully considered all the input they received during their deliberations. Lists of all participants are available in Volume II.

Meetings Schedule

Fifth Session, 41st Parliament

February 27, 2020	Planning	Victoria
April 8, 2020	Planning	Remote meeting
May 27, 2020	Planning	Remote meeting
June 1, 2020	Minister's Briefing Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 2, 2020	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 3, 2020	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 4, 2020	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 8, 2020	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 9, 2020	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 10, 2020	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 11, 2020 (AM)	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 11, 2020 (PM)	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 12, 2020 (AM)	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 12, 2020 (PM)	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 15, 2020	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 16, 2020	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 17, 2020	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 18, 2020	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 19, 2020 (AM)	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
June 19, 2020 (PM)	Public Hearing	Remote meeting
July 15, 2020	Deliberations	Remote meeting
July 22, 2020	Deliberations	Remote meeting
July 29, 2020	Deliberations	Remote meeting
August 4, 2020	Deliberations	Remote meeting
August 5, 2020	Deliberations	Remote meeting
August 6, 2020	Deliberations	Remote meeting
August 7, 2020	Deliberations	Remote meeting
August 12, 2020	Deliberations	Remote meeting
August 14, 2020	Deliberations Adoption of Report	Remote meeting

Equity and Inclusion

COVID-19

Many British Columbians spoke to how the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the depths of inequities in the province and expressed concerns that the crisis is making these inequities worse. They emphasized that government has an opportunity to make significant progress towards an inclusive, equitable and resilient society through its response to the pandemic, particularly with respect to reconciliation, diversity and inclusion, accessibility, and the digital divide.

Survey Highlights

- Question 2: Increase programs for women, LGBTQ2S+ people, Indigenous people and others who face systemic barriers received the most selections.
 - Question 3: Indigenous resources and reconciliation received 12.3 cents.
-

Reconciliation

Indigenous peoples

Throughout the report, references to Indigenous peoples is intended to recognize the diversity, and to be inclusive, of all Indigenous communities, including but not limited to First Nations, Métis and Inuit, as well as on-reserve and off-reserve, and urban and rural. It is also intended to recognize that engagement with, and the provision of programs and services to, Indigenous peoples requires a distinctions-based approach that addresses the distinct needs of different Indigenous communities and individuals.

Many British Columbians referenced the importance of BC fulfilling obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in response to the first question in the survey related to the top three priorities. They suggested focusing efforts on reconciliation, including providing better supports to urban Indigenous peoples and communities.

Several submissions also emphasized the need for culturally safe and culturally responsive programs and services. They described how the budget and the recovery present an opportunity to strengthen and improve the process of reconciliation and continue transformational change. Some pointed to the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and how the legislation creates a path forward with respect to the unique

experiences of Indigenous peoples while encouraging a spirit of cooperation. They emphasized that the legislation is simply a starting point and sufficient funding is needed for implementation.

The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres discussed the importance of culturally safe, appropriate and relevant health and social services for Indigenous peoples by Indigenous peoples in requesting funding for their association. They explained that friendship centres continue to address the systemic and structural racism Indigenous peoples experience and that mainstream providers who hold funding for Indigenous communities are not accountable to Indigenous peoples. They particularly highlighted the need for funding in health, mental health, wellness, emergency supports, anti-violence, family supports, affordable housing, and food security.

The Committee also heard about the need to specifically advance reconciliation with Métis people. Métis Nation British Columbia, the governing nation for Métis in BC, noted that Métis people hold Section 35 rights in the *Constitution Act, 1982*; however, they are often forgotten. They emphasized the importance of ensuring all Indigenous peoples are involved in decisions, programs and policies that affect them. They sought funding to better meet their mandate of developing and enhancing opportunities for Métis communities in BC.

Diversity and Inclusion

Several submissions noted that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable, marginalized and equity-seeking populations, including Indigenous peoples, women, people with disabilities, LGBTQ2S+ people, Black people, and people of colour. They shared that emergency response and recovery planning needs to be responsive and address intersecting and overlapping layers of discrimination and vulnerability as well as systemic barriers. Accordingly, they recommended ministries adopt a diversity and inclusion lens to recognize and address the impact of the pandemic as well as ongoing inequities.

Racism, discrimination, harassment and systemic barriers for vulnerable, marginalized and equity-seeking people were also highlighted. British Columbians recommended increased funding for programs and supports for these populations, including funding to a broad range of community organizations who serve these populations. Some recommended investments in anti-racism and anti-discrimination initiatives and diversity training, particularly in workplaces, communities, and public law enforcement. Out On Screen stated that resources and funding should be prioritized for organizations that have diverse leadership and staff and who overtly and intentionally serve diverse communities, noting that in meeting the needs of vulnerable, marginalized and equity-seeking people, all British Columbians are lifted.

The Committee also heard about the specific impact of the pandemic on women. YWCA Metro Vancouver stated that women and children are particularly affected by poverty and that COVID-19 has deepened this issue as women are concentrated in jobs and sectors hardest hit by the pandemic and women make up most part-time and minimum wage workers. In addition to significant increases in income supports and measures to support women and children, a gender responsive approach to public policy and recovery was recommended.

Accessibility

The Committee also heard from organizations regarding improving accessibility. The Rick Hansen Foundation noted that benefits to improving accessibility include: an increased supply of accessible workplaces and

housing; invigorated and diversified labour market participation; and enhanced aging in place options. They recommended developing and implementing accessibility legislation in BC, including strengthening public construction policies to require new public construction projects to be accessible. Implementing and developing accessibility legislation was also supported by the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, BC and Yukon Division.

B.C. Guide Dog Services informed the Committee that waitlists for guide dogs have grown to nearly four years and requested funding for a new training and breeding facility for service and support dogs to meet the demand from persons with disabilities living in BC. The organization, which provides guide dogs for individuals who are visually impaired, children with autism spectrum disorder, veterans, and individuals suffering from operational stress injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder, stated that their guide and service dogs can transform the lives of British Columbians by removing barriers to participation in the workforce, social and family life, and in society in general.

Digital Connectivity

Many presentations and submissions described how the pandemic exposed inequities with adapting to a digital environment, particularly with respect to access to, and affordability of, broadband. Many British Columbians, as well as companies such as TELUS and Shaw Communications Inc., noted that the pandemic has accelerated digital transformation and further centralized the role of technology by showing how digital networks can support work, education, entertainment, connection with friends and family, and access to important services. It also revealed that more work needs to be done to ensure all British Columbians have access to better, affordable, reliable internet connections as these connections are necessary for individuals, communities and businesses to be resilient. Concerns were especially expressed about gaps for vulnerable individuals, who may lack access or ability to use technology.

MOSAIC shared that resources and skills to access technology and high-speed internet are major obstacles for immigrants, refugees, migrant workers, and low-income families trying to access vital social programs and services that moved online due to the pandemic. They recommended creating an inclusive digital strategy and funding social service and settlement organizations to support vulnerable populations in acquiring the tools, skills, and connectivity they need. They also suggested expanding the Connected Communities initiative that currently supports the digital readiness of rural communities to include urban areas and vulnerable communities in cities. ASPECT BC similarly shared concerns that those most vulnerable are slipping further behind because they do not have access to technology nor the ability to use technology.

Connectivity in rural, remote and Indigenous communities was also a key theme. The Prince George Chamber of Commerce and the Enderby and District Chamber of Commerce noted how digital connectivity was critical for enabling businesses to survive and enabling British Columbians to work from home. Both Chambers, along with the City of Prince George and the BC Chamber of Commerce, stressed the significant challenges with access to broadband in rural, remote and Indigenous communities, and the need to make investments in digital infrastructure in these communities. The BC Chamber of Commerce further emphasized that broadband and cellular services should be considered essential utilities.

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition and the BC Teachers' Federation recommended making internet access a universal basic service with \$10-a-month internet and basic standard of technology for British Columbians living at or below the poverty line. They described how broadband is a requirement of modern life, not just during the pandemic, and how inequity of access is felt more strongly by school-aged children as online and

distance learning has grown. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives also similarly supported investments that help low-income households afford internet and digital services.

Conclusions

Committee Members reflected on how reconciliation, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and digital connectivity continuously emerged across many themes and on their relationship with equity. In particular, they acknowledged how the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected vulnerable, marginalized and equity-seeking populations, including lower-income British Columbians more than others, and risks deepening many inequities. The Committee stressed it is critical that government's response is conscious of, and responsive to, these issues in order to make significant progress on the gaps.

One important component of that response is reconciliation. Committee Members acknowledged ongoing work in this regard and recommended the provision of resources to continue implementation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* as well as the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. They noted that continued efforts toward reconciliation require a distinction-based approach that recognizes the unique needs and diversity of Indigenous peoples.

The Committee also recommended all ministries recognize systemic barriers and adopt a diversity and inclusion lens to address ongoing inequities, along with increasing programs and supports for equity-seeking groups. Committee Members were of the view that government should be actively reflecting on their processes and programs to ensure accessibility and proactively reaching out to different communities to create pathways to service and support. Addressing racism and discrimination was also a key theme.

Strengthening accessibility policies and regulations within the public construction sector was also supported by Committee Members. They agreed that in order to address inequalities faced by people with disabilities, accessibility best practices and standards need to be considered within construction projects.

As it relates to digital connectivity, the Committee discussed how access to, and affordability of, internet connections is an issue of equity - it affects and supports social and economic resiliency, including access to health, entertainment, community and family connection, jobs, and education. This became especially apparent when British Columbians shifted to a digital environment at the outset of the pandemic. Committee Members noted how this shift left behind many individuals, families, communities and business due to lack of adequate infrastructure and unaffordability, with issues especially acute in rural, remote and Indigenous communities. They agreed that digital connectivity has emerged as essential infrastructure and recommended accelerated investments in this regard, emphasizing that there are opportunities through partnerships and leveraging last-mile connections to make significant progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Reconciliation

1. Provide sufficient resources to continue concrete action on the implementation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, including recognizing and addressing the needs of distinct First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

Diversity and Inclusion

2. In order to address ongoing inequities and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on vulnerable, marginalized and equity-seeking populations, ensure all ministries adopt a diversity and inclusion lens and recognize systemic barriers.
3. Increase programs and supports for equity-seeking groups who face systemic barriers.

Accessibility

4. Strengthen public construction policies to require new public construction projects to meaningfully meet accessibility best practices and standards.

Digital Connectivity

5. Work with the federal government and telecommunication companies to accelerate investments in extending and strengthening digital infrastructure and ensure the provision of affordable, equitable access to the internet across the province, with particular attention to rural, remote and Indigenous communities, in recognition of the critical importance of universal connectivity to the social and economic well-being of British Columbians.

Advanced Education

COVID-19

Post-secondary institutions, student associations and faculty associations described the wide-ranging impacts of the pandemic on the post-secondary sector. They expressed concerns about financial challenges due to a decline in enrolment, particularly with respect to international students who contribute significant revenue, and increased costs due to new health and safety measures and shifts to online learning. Gaps in digital infrastructure and access were also highlighted, especially for students joining classes from rural and remote communities across BC.

The direct impact on students was another key theme as some students and families are unsure of their ability to afford post-secondary education as emergency aid programs have excluded students. They also described how the financial impact, coupled with shifts to online learning, have affected and amplified mental health challenges. Student associations noted that international students have also experienced unique impacts as they may now be studying online from their home countries, at odd hours, and are not able to experience Canadian culture and life, which is a key component of their choosing to study in Canada.

Literacy organizations noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated changes related to automation and digitization, with communities turning to literacy programs and services to develop digital literacy skills for jobs and access to information. Other submissions similarly discussed the importance of supporting workers who have been displaced due to the pandemic through reskilling and upskilling programs.

Survey Highlights

- Question 1: Education was the 6th most common topic.
Key theme: increase funding and financial supports for post-secondary education.
 - Question 2: Increasing opportunities for training and post-secondary education received the 8th most selections.
 - Question 3: Post-secondary education and skills received 3.6 cents.
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Adult Education and Literacy

Literacy organizations requested increased, stable, multi-year funding for community literacy. Organizations such as the Cariboo-Chilcotin Partners for Literacy Society and the Chilliwack Learning Society explained that demand for literacy programs and services remains high and continues to grow, and that current funding is

insufficient to meet need. With many services and supports moving online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations further stressed the importance of digital literacy skills. Decoda Literacy Solutions explained that workplace changes such as automation and the shift to digital technology has resulted in job displacement and that many of those displaced typically have low literacy and lack essential skills. READ Surrey/White Rock Society, Dawson Creek Literacy Now and the Dawson Creek Literacy Society outlined the importance of literacy skills for maintaining community connections and access to information, as well as for access to jobs. Other organizations, including the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy and the Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society, described the importance of their programs and services for supporting vulnerable adults.

A number of submissions also advocated for increased investments in adult education. The Vancouver Community College Faculty Association explained that adult basic education programs serve adult learners who have not graduated from the K-12 system, often for reasons related to social inequality. They shared that developmental programs are a lifeline to equity-seeking communities; however, they do not typically generate revenue for the institution, so these programs are constantly at risk of being cut.

Some submissions pointed to inequities in funding when compared with K-12 education and advocated for increased funding as well as a broader range of course offerings. The BC Teachers' Federation explained that the current basic per-student funding for adult education is \$4,773 a year while for K-12 education it is \$7,648. The Federation noted that adult learners often work full-time while going to school, are single parents, or English language learners, and that the funding discrepancy means no additional funding is available for support services such as learning support or speech and language pathology or counselling.

Capital Funding

The Committee received requests for specific infrastructure projects related to aging facilities and student housing. The Vancouver Island University Faculty Association advocated for infrastructure investment on remote campuses noting that many schools are suffering from wear and tear. Similarly, Langara College noted that their original academic facility is well past its useful life but still holds more than half of all classroom space on campus and requested capital funding to build a new facility. Capilano Students' Union explained that their university is one of only three publicly funded universities in BC without dedicated on-campus residences or nearby purpose-built student housing and requested financial support to deliver on-campus housing.

Indigenous Students

With regard to Indigenous students, Langara College recommended including all post-secondary institutions in the Aboriginal Service Plan or replacing it with a new model that increases investments across the system to support Indigenous learners. They explained that they do not receive any funding from the program even though they serve a large Indigenous population. Supports for Indigenous students was also a priority for Okanagan College. They shared that they have a growing number of Indigenous students and would welcome additional supports with respect to credential completion and transitions to employment, as well as institutional support for developing cultural competencies among employees and Indigenization of the curriculum and services.

Métis Nation British Columbia requested funding for their Métis Employment and Training Program. The funding would support the provision of provincial liaison officers to educate post-secondary institutions and

other organizations on the program's services as well as provide Métis specific cultural education; it will also support life skills education for youth and the provision of forestry and environmental programs.

International Students

Many student organizations described how the reliance on international student tuition has made post-secondary institutions financially vulnerable. Vancouver Island University Students' Union shared that at Vancouver Island University, international students make up approximately 20 percent of the total student population but contribute half of the total tuition revenue. Capilano Students' Union noted that BC has been able to attract international students by relying on the reputation of Canada as a good place to study abroad; however, unpredictability in tuition increases, coupled with students already cautious about their education plans due to COVID-19, could result in BC post-secondary institutions experiencing a drastic decline in international student enrolment over the next few years. The lack of regulations on tuition fee increases for international students and how that contributes to unpredictability was also discussed by the Douglas Students' Union who recommended a cap on the annual increase. The British Columbia Federation of Students emphasized that a decline in international student enrolment will result in BC losing millions of dollars in annual spending from international students living in the province.

Several student organizations, including the Alliance of BC Students, recommended reducing or eliminating the Medical Services Plan (MSP) premiums for international students as a means to make the province more attractive for international students. The Simon Fraser Student Society stated that increasing MSP premiums for international post-secondary students highlights the dependence on international students to contribute a disproportionate amount to the funding of programs and services. The University of Victoria Students' Society explained that international students are struggling with affordability and are twice as likely to access support services as domestic students.

Some student associations proposed creating an international educational strategy in consultation with students and key stakeholders in the sector. The Thompson Rivers University Students' Union reflected on the value that international student enrolment brings to post-secondary institutions and communities across the province and advocated for a new international student strategy to maximize these benefits while also ensuring that international students are supported. The Okanagan College Students' Union similarly emphasized the importance of having a strategy to assist international students in their cultural, social, and academic integration.

Online Learning and Digital Infrastructure

Post-secondary institutions described their quick shifts to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for investments in online learning supports and infrastructure. Langara College noted that COVID-19 has highlighted the need for additional investments in information technology hardware, software, and infrastructure as well as improvements to wireless infrastructure across BC to ensure all students can participate in remote learning. Similarly, the University of British Columbia stated that as online learning will continue for some time, it is important to ensure that students still receive high-quality learning experiences and services that support their academic success and mental well-being.

Open Education

Several organizations requested increased funding to expand open education resources – teaching and learning resources that are available in the public domain and free to use. They stated that open education resources help address affordability and financial barriers related to the cost of textbooks. Okanagan College Students' Union explained that textbooks typically cost more than \$200 each so many students choose to either not purchase the book, to share books with multiple classmates, or to buy outdated editions, impacting their success in the classroom. The British Columbia Federation of Students further noted that open education resources can be made available in formats that are accessible to people with disabilities and those who do not have reliable access to the internet. Several student associations, including the Alliance of BC Students and the Alma Mater Society at UBC Vancouver, suggested increased investment in BCcampus, the primary developer of open education resources in BC, to allow for increased adaptation of open textbooks.

Operational Funding

Post-secondary institutions outlined expected revenue shortfalls due to a decline in enrolment of both international and domestic students who may be rethinking beginning post-secondary education at this time, particularly as it relates to receiving value-for-money and online learning. Camosun College Faculty Association explained that a loss of tuition revenue is forcing post-secondary institutions to look at cuts, including staff reductions, to meet the continued expectations for balanced budgets. The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC shared that institutions have been prompted to lay off faculty due to the budget shortfalls which will result in reduced course offerings and student support. To address these challenges, a number of institutions, including Okanagan College, suggested providing financial flexibility to allow institutions to draw on reserves across different years to permit timely responses to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations such as the Alliance of BC Students recommended allowing post-secondary institutions to run budget deficits.

Some submissions discussed long-standing challenges with funding for post-secondary institutions. Selkirk College Faculty Association stated that public funding is decreasing each year with approximately 50 percent of the funding coming from government and the rest from domestic and international tuition, contracts, and research grants. Submissions described the impact of decreasing public funding, including program cuts, increased waitlists for programs and courses, deteriorating equipment and antiquated facilities, and increased reliance on increases in tuition fees and ancillary fees. The Emily Carr Students' Union and the Emily Carr Faculty Association requested a review of the post-secondary funding model with the goal of increasing funding within the system, reducing reliance on profit-generating activities, and restoring majority-public core funding.

The Committee also received funding requests for specific institutions and programs. Simon Fraser University referred to a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2006 in which the province pledged to double the size of their Surrey campus from 2,500 to 5,000 domestic student seats by 2015; however, this commitment has not yet been met. Thompson Rivers University requested support for several programs, including: Nursing and Health Care Assistant; Respiratory Therapy; Master of Nursing and Nurse Practitioner; and Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical Engineering and Bachelor of Engineering in Computer Engineering. They noted that COVID-19 has highlighted the value and need for health-care workers, as well as for people who work in and create technology, and that these programs will help to address these needs.

Research

As it relates to research, submissions highlighted both challenges and opportunities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing how research is responding to the pandemic. The Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia stated that graduate student and faculty researchers are dealing with interruptions in programs and funding shortfalls for grants due to the pandemic. They suggested retooling the Knowledge Development Fund to support infrastructure and a system of arm's-length, peer-reviewed grants for research. Thompson Rivers University shared that their scientists are working with local authorities to investigate sewage, identify traces of the coronavirus, and create a possible early warning detection test. They requested support to establish an Interior Region Research Development Fund as well as increased investments in graduate students and additional research funding opportunities for undergraduate students. The University of Victoria highlighted how research and training can contribute to scientific, medical and socioeconomic issues and advocated for enhanced partnerships with postsecondary institutions to advance high-impact research.

Student Supports

Several submissions requested additional investments in student supports including financial assistance, supports to navigate the job market, and mental health and counselling supports. Organizations such as the Capilano Students' Union and the Research Universities' Council of British Columbia explained that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted continued gaps in mental health support available on-campus, including in-person counsellors available for follow-up and continual care. They noted that an investment in in-person mental health services on post-secondary campuses would be greatly welcomed during a time where many are struggling to find access to the support systems they need. Thompson Rivers University shared that demand for student service supports has been a growing concern for universities in recent years with students worried about finances, adapting to the change in the delivery of education, and dealing with other personal and family issues. They requested additional capacity to target needs-based resources directly, particularly to vulnerable students.

Technology, Trades and Skills Training

The Committee also heard about opportunities to support workers who have been displaced due to the pandemic and trends towards automation and digital technology, including through reskilling and upskilling as well as the recognition of skills acquired through prior learning and experiential learning. The Enderby and District Chamber of Commerce noted a need for increased access to post-secondary technology, trades, and degree programs to address the existing and increasing worker shortage in technology services. They explained that as shifts to remote solutions continues, more workers must service these networks and provide support for online platforms and development. The Chamber also recommended the expansion of online courses into other ticketed arenas to allow workers looking to upskill to work and learn at their own pace. Similarly, BC Prior Learning Action Network explained that more and more people who have acquired skills in the workplace are being displaced and these individuals have skills that have not been identified or validated other than with their company of employment. They noted that prior learning assessment and recognition is a crucial part of assisting in the transition of the workforce and recommended investment in the prior learning process.

Tuition and Financial Assistance

Many submissions encouraged additional measures to address the affordability of post-secondary education, including investing in financial assistance and freezing and reducing tuition. In light of the pandemic, the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia advocated for special funding to enhance scholarships and bursaries for students, to provide targeted funding for student employment on campus, and to offer targeted grants to low- and middle-income students.

Several organizations recommended increased investments in graduate student supports. The Graduate Student Society of UBC Vancouver explained that BC has historically lagged other provinces in supporting graduate education. They acknowledged that the province introduced the BC Graduate Scholarship in 2018; however, the funding period is slated to end in 2021 and it was limited to science, technology, engineering and math programs. Accordingly, they recommended making the program permanent and extending eligibility to other disciplines. The Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia also recommended increasing funding for the BC Graduate Scholarship, noting that many graduate students are facing an extra year of study because their research has been disrupted.

Royal Roads University advocated for distance programs to be recognized for loan eligibility and for the removal of the restriction of full-time student loans for executive programs. They explained that currently only on-campus courses and their online versions are eligible for full-time federal or provincial loans, meaning that only 10 of their 72 programs are eligible. They also noted that executive programs are currently not eligible for student loans as the rules assume that these students work full-time and therefore do not require assistance. They explained that not all students can choose to work while studying which results in a discriminatory barrier, particularly for family caregivers.

Pearson College UWC requested two scholarships for BC Indigenous students in the amount of \$120,000. They highlighted how the College is unique in representing diversity and bringing students from around the world to study and learn from one another. They shared that over 50 percent of their students are on full financial scholarships provided through the College, which is achieved through fundraising and their endowment; the College receives supports from several other Canadian jurisdictions but does not currently receive funding from BC. They described the scholarships as an opportunity for the province to support their students, particularly those facing systemic barriers.

Conclusions

The Committee recognized that the post-secondary sector is facing significant financial challenges due to the pandemic. Committee Members agreed that mechanisms and flexibility need to be provided in the short-term to address these financial challenges. Financial vulnerability associated with international student tuition was also discussed; stakeholders should be brought together to develop a comprehensive international student education strategy to examine the business model and the integration of international students within the context of broader goals and outcomes for the post-secondary system in BC.

Increased operational funding for the sector in order to facilitate economic recovery and encourage further education was also recommended. The Committee discussed opportunities to increase spaces at institutions, such as Simon Fraser University and Kwantlen Polytechnic University, as well as to increase capacity at smaller institutions across the province. Committee Members emphasized that investments also need to support

access to education for underrepresented groups and address ongoing and predicted labour gaps. They also noted similar opportunities through capital investments to upgrade post-secondary infrastructure.

The Committee further recommended increased support to post-secondary institutions to fulfill their commitments to reconciliation and to make post-secondary education accessible to all Indigenous students. Committee Members noted that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Calls for Justice from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls provide for a framework and that it is important to ensure the post-secondary system honours and recognizes all aspects of Indigenous culture.

Committee Members also noted that increased investments in post-secondary education could help individuals who have been displaced by COVID-19 and other workplace changes, such as automation and digital technology, to transition to new careers, including in trades and technology. Part of this includes providing flexible learning opportunities as well as recognizing skills acquired through prior and experiential learning. The Committee also supported increased funding for literacy and adult education to enable individuals to acquire the core literacy skills required for additional learning and training.

Committee Members appreciated how post-secondary institutions adapted and collaborated to support each other with online delivery over the last months and recognized the challenges this presented. As institutions continue to look at online delivery models, the Committee agreed that investments are needed in teaching tools, technology, and professional development, along with general investments in connectivity to enable students to participate in online learning (see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion).

With respect to student supports and financial assistance, Committee Members acknowledged recent initiatives related to mental health and the provision of grants to students. They recognized opportunities to better support graduate students and recommended that the BC Graduate Scholarship be extended and that eligibility be expanded to additional disciplines. The Committee also recognized opportunities to address systemic inequities to education more generally by addressing a broad range of financial barriers related to the direct and indirect costs of post-secondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Adult Education and Literacy

6. Provide stable, multi-year funding for community literacy across BC.
7. Increase resources to adult education to provide a broader range of course offerings and ensure equity in the funding of adult students and school-age students.

Capital Funding

8. Invest in upgrading existing post-secondary infrastructure, including encouraging and leveraging opportunities to expand satellite campuses in rural, remote and underserved communities.

Indigenous Students

9. Support post-secondary institutions in advancing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls by ensuring post-secondary education is accessible to Indigenous learners and honours and recognizes Indigenous culture.

International Students

10. Create a provincial international student education strategy, in consultation with students, post-secondary institutions and other key stakeholders, which examines the business model, the cultural, academic and economic integration of international students, and intended goals and outcomes of post-secondary education.

Online Learning and Digital Infrastructure

11. Provide sufficient support to post-secondary institutions for teaching and learning tools, infrastructure and technology, and training to facilitate professional development for the online delivery of courses. [see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion]

Operational Funding

12. Explore mechanisms, such as allowing the use of accumulated surpluses, to provide post-secondary institutions with short-term flexibility to navigate the financial impacts of the pandemic.
13. Invest in post-secondary education and expanding the number of seats available to students as a means to facilitate economic recovery and address immediate and projected gaps in the labour market, including ensuring local training and reskilling opportunities and reducing barriers for underrepresented groups.

Technology, Trades and Skills Training

14. Provide flexible reskilling and upskilling opportunities in online and in-person formats with a lens to equity, reconciliation and accessibility, and recognize skills acquired through prior and experiential learning, to support workers displaced due to automation, shifts to digital technology and the pandemic, including promoting and expanding technology and trades-related training and careers.

Tuition Fees and Financial Assistance

15. Provide a multi-year extension to the BC Graduate Scholarship and expand its eligibility to graduate students in non-STEM disciplines.
16. Facilitate access to education by addressing financial barriers related to the direct and indirect costs of education, including child care and transportation.

Arts, Culture and Libraries

COVID-19

British Columbians emphasized the value of arts and culture during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly with respect to managing mental health. They also stressed the significant impact of the pandemic on the sector with many venues closed, events canceled, and productions halted. The performing arts and live music sectors were particularly hard hit as they are reliant on the ability of people to assemble in large numbers. Due to the public health order prohibiting gatherings of more than 50 people until there is a vaccine, it will be some time before the live music sector recovers. DigiBC noted that the impact of COVID-19 on the interactive and digital media industry has been mixed with some smaller studios struggling and others thriving due to increased video game consumption.

Public libraries, library boards, and individuals highlighted the important role that public libraries have played during the COVID-19 pandemic, including assisting people to fill out government forms, providing connection and entertainment to people who feel isolated, and ensuring equitable access to online resources and learning opportunities. Public libraries across the province advocated for increased funding and professional development support, highlighting their vital role in connecting people to resources and reducing isolation during the pandemic.

Survey Highlights

- Question 3: Arts and culture received 4.2 cents.
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Arts and Culture

Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists/West Chapter and the Conseil Culturel et Artistique Francophone de la C.-B. was two of several organizations and individuals who advocated for recovery funding for the arts and culture sector, noting that the sector is expected to take a long time to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Western Canada Theatre explained that increased philanthropic giving could enable recovery and recommended tax incentives for individual and corporate philanthropic support of the arts. The ProArt Alliance of Greater Victoria similarly noted that tax breaks for patrons to reengage in cultural activities and products such as buying books, attending concerts, visiting museums, or trips to parks will go a long way to enabling recovery. Organizations such as the BC Alliance for Arts + Culture further highlighted how many turned to the arts and creativity during the pandemic to maintain their mental health and address feelings of isolation. In recognition of this, many organizations encouraged communicating the value of arts and culture to the public.

Many organizations also highlighted the value of arts and culture generally in their requests for increased funding to the sector. The BC Alliance for Arts + Culture noted that the sector contributes to the well-being of society, prioritizes inclusion, and builds resilient communities while the Kamloops Art Gallery described how arts and culture foster empathy and an understanding of the broader human condition. Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists/West Chapter noted that the sector provides a significant return on investment supporting the film industry, tourism, education and the mental health and well-being of British Columbians. The value of arts in rural communities was highlighted by Krista Patterson who advocated for increased investment in arts and cultural activities in rural BC, noting that the quality of life in the Kootenays is richer due to investment in local arts and culture.

Several organizations called specifically for increased funding for the BC Arts Council. The Conseil Culturel et Artistique Francophone de la C.-B. explained that supporting the BC Arts Council is the most direct and effective way to ensure that the resources can reach and support individual artists and arts organizations so they can serve their communities. Other organizations including the Trail and District Arts Council called for long term and broad supports for the arts as well as more core funding as opposed to project-based funding.

Arts infrastructure was also a focus in several submissions and presentations. The Vancouver Art Gallery shared that their current facility threatens the safety of their collection, has insufficient climate controls, and requires seismic upgrading, and called for investment in shovel ready and shovel worthy cultural infrastructure. Organizations such as Heritage BC noted that funding infrastructure would allow museums, heritage and historic places to leverage other sources of funding, while safeguarding collections, archives, and heritage buildings. Key City Theatre and other organizations highlighted the need for funding to support local governments in maintaining arts infrastructure such as live performing arts venues, galleries and museums, even if they are not housed in municipal facilities. Other submissions called for a BC Gaming program for arts venue funding.

Another common theme related to the arts and culture sector was promoting diversity and inclusion. Capitol Theatre Restoration Society noted that arts presenters showcase and celebrate the lives of all British Columbians and help to prevent assumptions about homogeneity. Similarly, the Vancouver Art Gallery described their venue as a place where people of different races, ages, religions and sexual orientations can come together to contribute to a creative conversation about who we are and how we make sense of the world. The ProArt Alliance of Greater Victoria noted, however, that current funding and financial support systems are not reaching all members of the arts and culture sector who are in need. They stated that Indigenous, Black, and other artists of colour are systemically discouraged access to government and corporate funding and foundation programs. Individuals and organizations also recommended support for equity-seeking artists, decolonization and anti-racism initiatives, and strategies for a respectful, inclusive and equitable society through arts and culture programs.

Digital Media, Music, and Film

Several organizations emphasized the value of Amplify BC and Creative BC to their industries. The Music BC Industry Association noted that Amplify BC is one of the few funding opportunities available to the commercial sector and that a multi-year commitment for Amplify BC would preserve jobs and help small venues in providing emerging talents with a place to perform. Both the Motion Picture Production Industry Association of B.C. and the Canadian Media Producers Association, BC Producers Branch advocated for increasing Creative BC's budget to allow for more development and domestic production financing

emphasizing the importance of Creative BC for the domestic film industry. The Canadian Media Producers Association, BC Branch also explained that BC producers' access to national funding is rarely proportionate to the size of the province's sector due in part to a lack of provincial production funding to leverage national and international funding and a lack of local representation from Canadian Media Fund, Telefilm and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Another theme was the need for tax credits and incentives related to diversity and inclusion, job creation, and supporting studios and companies outside of the Lower Mainland and Greater Victoria. The Motion Picture Production Industry Association of B.C. noted that Creative BC's administration of the tax credit program is recognized as the most efficient and effective in North America. They highlighted the importance of stability and reliability of tax credits in building the industry and in leveraging federal funding. DigiBC explained that providing an additional five percent diversity and inclusion tax credit calculated on an individual employee basis for employing underrepresented employees in technical positions would help to remove barriers to participation in the industry for people of colour, LGBTQ2S+ individuals, persons with disabilities, and women. Similarly, the Union of BC Performers noted that the film and television industry in BC is relatively homogenous and proposed a labour-based film and television tax credit to incent the hiring of Indigenous peoples, women, people of colour, and people with disabilities. They explained that tax credits have been successful in addressing gaps, such as shortfalls in post-production work, in the film and television industry in the past and were of the view that an equity film incentive can do the same for underrepresented workers.

Three organizations made recommendations regarding the book publishing tax credit. The Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia explained that the fluctuating renewal schedule of this credit has created challenges for publishers in making longer-term business decisions, and recommended reinstating a five-year renewal period. The Association also noted disruptions to the supply chain due to COVID-19 and suggested creating a cultural tax benefit for purchasing BC-published books.

Public Libraries

There was another writing campaign this year advocating for increased funding for public libraries with the Committee receiving over 70 submissions of support. The submissions acknowledged the one-time grant of \$3 million announced in March 2020 to assist public libraries to implement technology and resources to better support communities during and after the pandemic. They advocated for a further one-time investment of \$3 million to support training and professional development for public library staff, as well as sustained and reliable increases to the provincial operating grant for public libraries. The Association of BC Public Library Directors explained that this one-time funding would help to develop a skilled library workforce to manage the growing complexity in social needs and technology while still catering to people's research, reading, and literacy needs. Many organizations noted that funding for public libraries has not increased since 2010; however, the cost of doing business has increased, leaving libraries to manage more with less.

The Committee also heard about a need for libraries and learning centres in Indigenous communities. Gordon Yusko highlighted the Write to Read BC Project as a model for increasing literacy equity through access to literacy materials for rural and remote Indigenous communities. Squamish Public Library emphasized opportunities to increase initiatives toward reconciliation including collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation on promoting programs in libraries that have established relationships with Indigenous communities.

Another theme in this area was support for a funding model that addresses rural and regional libraries. Grand Forks and District Public Library stated that public libraries in rural areas are underfunded and increasingly rely on their small municipalities and regional districts for their operating and capital expenses. Similarly, Vancouver Island Regional Library noted that regional libraries face significant capital costs yet are not eligible for many capital grants available to municipalities.

Conclusions

The Committee acknowledged the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all areas of the arts and culture sector and that a full recovery is unlikely to occur until phase four of the BC Restart Plan. During their deliberations, Members spoke about the value of this sector in helping people to maintain their mental health during the pandemic. They recognized the need for short term recovery funding in addition to ongoing requests for long-term and operational funding.

Committee Members noted that much of the funding for arts and culture organizations is provided through the BC Arts Council and appreciated the need for flexibility and predictability of funding, including core operational and infrastructure funding. Members noted that philanthropic giving is a significant source of revenue for the arts and culture sector and that many organizations have experienced a substantial drop in individual and corporate revenue due to COVID-19. They agreed that providing tax credits for patrons to re-engage in cultural activities and to encourage donations would help the arts and culture community. Committee Members further recognized the need for infrastructure projects in all sectors, particularly in arts and culture which has been significantly impacted by the pandemic.

Regarding digital media, music, and film, the Committee acknowledged the planning difficulties organizations experience as a result of the annual renewal schedule for Amplify BC and that this has been compounded by the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the music industry. Members also noted the ongoing struggles in leveraging federal funding for film and television production and the importance of investing in Creative BC in this regard, emphasizing the value of domestic production given restrictions on international production due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee also noted barriers to participation for underrepresented groups across arts, culture, digital media and film organizations and supported the provision of tax credits to incent the hiring of individuals from these communities. The Committee was also supportive of extending the book publishing tax credit noting that it has been very effective and is the only funding source for the industry.

Committee Members recognized the clear value libraries provide as evidenced by challenges stemming from the closure of libraries during the pandemic, especially in connecting people to the internet and providing essential services and resources, particularly in rural communities. Members recognized that funding for libraries has remained stagnant for several years and recommended increasing operational funding, as well as supporting training, and the delivery of library services in Indigenous and rural communities. They further recommended the promotion of reconciliation programs in libraries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Arts and Culture

17. Recognize the value of the arts and culture sector during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing recovery funding for the sector.
18. Support long-term recovery, innovation and adaptation in the arts and culture sector by providing increased, flexible, multi-year funding through the B.C. Arts Council, incenting individual and corporate donations, offering tax breaks for patrons to reengage in arts and culture activities, and working with other levels of government and community partners to increase investments in arts and culture infrastructure.

Digital Media, Music and Film

19. Provide multi-year funding for Amplify BC.
20. Invest in Creative BC to build the industry and leverage federal funding, including funding for domestic production.
21. Maintain existing film and production services tax credits and renew the book publishing tax credit, and review tax credits periodically for competitiveness with other jurisdictions.
22. Explore measures, such as tax credits or hiring incentives, to address inequities and barriers for underrepresented groups in the arts, culture and digital media industry.

Public Libraries

23. Provide sustained and reliable annual increases to the provincial operating grant for public libraries, including funding for training and professional development, and support the delivery of library services in Indigenous and rural communities.
24. Encourage collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to promote reconciliation programs in libraries.

Economic Development

COVID-19

Multiple sectors described challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic and shared concerns about their ability to recover. Several organizations particularly stressed the devastating impact the pandemic has had on the tourism sector. They explained that BC's visitor economy was the first and hardest hit of the major business sectors with tourism revenues anticipated to be only a third of what they were in 2019, and that the sector will require significant support to survive.

The aerospace industry highlighted how necessary restrictions have resulted in a decrease in business with regional services feeling the impact and how the industry does not have the resources to work through a protracted recovery. Some sectors, such as forestry, drew attention to ongoing challenges that have been compounded by the pandemic, and discussed opportunities to not only address those challenges, but facilitate economic recovery.

Agriculture organizations noted issues posed by disruptions to the supply chain and to labour supply, and the impact of health and safety protocols on productivity. They also emphasized the importance of farming and the food supply system to economic recovery and ensuring consumers have safe and secure access to food. Food security and resilience, and the need to sustain local systems and consider food in emergency response, were also emphasized by a number of organizations.

Supports related to labour and immigration, particularly for training and re-skilling for workers affected by COVID-19, was another key theme. Organizations also highlighted how the pandemic presents an opportunity to transition displaced workers and underrepresented groups to new and emerging sectors, such as the digital economy.

Aerospace

The British Columbia Aviation Council discussed the need to support BC's aerospace industry as the province recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. Noting how regional services are essential for many small, remote and Indigenous communities, they indicated that additional help is required to ensure these services survive and are able to support regional recovery.

The Council further emphasized that aviation operators, schools and organizations are small businesses working in a capital-intensive industry with substantial fixed costs and limited financial resources. As such, the Council suggested a range of measures to support the sector such as: low-barrier, forgivable loans and grants; investments to simulate domestic, and when safe to do so, international travel; increased funding and contributions to airport projects through the British Columbia Air Access program; and increased student aid for flight training.

Longview Aviation Capital similarly highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the sector and the need to ensure the future of BC's aerospace industry in the global market. They advocated for efforts to support growth of a globally competitive supply chain through government procurement, funding for green technology and manufacturing process, investments in post-secondary education and skills training, and the promotion of aerospace careers.

Agriculture, Agri-Foods and Food Security

Several presentations and submissions discussed how the pandemic revealed issues with market instability and supply chains, and the need to rethink the operations of the food system and food security. Supply chains are highly centralized, complex and efficient; however, they have little redundancy or flexibility. The BC Agriculture Council noted that the pandemic has shifted the focus for the food system from sustainability, affordability and choice to resilience. They emphasized that government and farmers have common objectives in ensuring farming and the food supply system can be effective for economic recovery and in ensuring consumers have safe and secure access to food.

The BC Agriculture Council and the BC Fruit Growers' Association recommended supporting farmers by addressing financial stress through improvements to the AgriStability program. Both organizations indicated that this risk management program is no longer effective and has structural issues related to pricing, costs, and administration. The BC Fruit Growers' Association further discussed how government can work with the sector to provide adequate, nutritious food at affordable prices with continued investments in the Tree Fruit Replant program, Buy BC, and institutional purchasing policies.

The two organizations also shared that the pandemic disrupted seasonal labour supply which is dependent on international workers; while they appreciated government's investments in quarantining temporary foreign workers, health and safety protocols mean farms are unable to employ as many workers and productivity has therefore declined. As such, they requested assistance with pandemic-related costs, improved coordination and sharing of information across the sector to help farmers access and protect seasonal workers, and investments in applied innovation and agritech to help farmers automate routine tasks.

Another area of concern was mitigation and adaptation to climate change, particularly as it relates to water supply and storage. Several organizations, including the BC Cattlemen's Association and the BC Dairy Association, described how water storage is key to environmental sustainability, and that ongoing investments in this infrastructure are required to strengthen the food supply.

The BC Cattlemen's Association also discussed processing capacity, noting that it is centralized in Alberta and that BC lacks post-processing capacity. Their organization has been working on a plan for a cooperative of producer-owned and gate-to-plate, and they would like to see government continue to invest in this capacity. The Association further highlighted opportunities for government to consider food production in the management of Crown lands, and especially the Agricultural Land Reserve on Crown land, and recommended the province create a forage development plan.

The need to sustain local food systems, farmers, growers, processors, and local artisan businesses was another theme. The BC Association of Farmers' Markets described how farmers markets demonstrated flexibility in adapting in-person markets to ensure health and safety and moving to e-commerce due to the pandemic; however, operating revenues for markets are down and not all markets and farmers have had the

capacity to adapt. As such, the Association recommended investments in areas such as digital connectivity in rural and remote areas, and farmers' markets e-commerce initiatives.

The Committee also heard from several community food hub organizations, such as LUSH Valley Food Action Society, Cowichan Green Community, Alberni Valley Food Hub and Nanaimo Foodshare Society, on how food security is critical for resilient communities. They described how their organizations work to provide healthy food access to increasing numbers of people in local communities, and highlighted challenges with coordination and capacity. They were also of the view that food security and food supply disruptions are not adequately considered as part of emergency response. They therefore requested funding for community food hub organizations, and better recognition of food security as part of emergency plans, along with investments in local food infrastructure such as community kitchens, aggregation sites, and processing facilities. Nanaimo Foodshare Society also recommended funding for community dietician positions to support capacity-building in food security from a nutrition lens.

The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres also highlighted gaps with regard to food security. Many of their centres have been delivering food boxes to Elders and have developed their own food programs during the pandemic. They noted that urban populations continue to struggle to meet basic nutrition needs as the cost of food has risen dramatically.

Northern Confluence Initiative discussed investments in agricultural productivity and production as an opportunity to support rural development. They encouraged collaboration with local governments and Indigenous communities in coordinating local producers, building capacity, creating space for community gardens, and supporting farmers' markets.

Richmond FarmWatch and the Council of Canadians, Delta-Richmond Chapter highlighted concerns with respect to the availability of farmland, including the expansion of permitted uses on protected farmland in the Agricultural Land Reserve, and the ability of farmers to compete to buy land. They recommended revising farm classification and status to encourage farming and introducing taxation measures to discourage speculation and ensure farmland is used for farming.

The Committee also heard from the BC SPCA that the need for animal welfare services continues to be high. The organization is providing boarding and care for animals and families that need help during the pandemic, including people who are fleeing inter-personal violence, and are unable to take their pets with them. They noted increased demand and donor challenges due to COVID-19 and anticipate demand for services will continue to grow while funding sources and volunteer capacity have declined significantly. Accordingly, the BC SPCA requested capital funding to complete facility upgrades as well as operational funding to assist with enforcing animal welfare.

Cannabis

The Association of Canadian Cannabis Retailers made recommendations to support the viability and growth of private cannabis retailers. They stated that confusion between legal, regulated retailers and unregulated retailers, along with disparities in price which they attribute to the excise and wholesale tax burdens, and the quality of cannabis between the regulated and unregulated systems, fuels the unregulated and illicit markets. Accordingly, they recommend a review of the tax burden on cannabis products as well as a public awareness campaign about regulated avenues for cannabis purchases. The Association further stated that

BC Cannabis Stores have increased economic pressure on independent retailers and that the introduction of more government stores should be paused.

In a presentation to the Committee, Clayton McCann advocated for the creation of a cannabis appellations program. He explained that an appellations program would organize and protect cannabis farming by conveying authenticity, setting product and production standards, and providing label of original information, and in so doing, provide economic benefits by promoting rural and regional development.

Forestry

The BC Council of Forest Industries highlighted ongoing challenges for the forest sector related to external factors such as markets and tariffs, and how these challenges have been compounded by the pandemic, noting that the sector experienced over 100 curtailments and closures in 2019 and early 2020. They stated that a strong, sustainable forest sector is critical to the BC economy and can help lead recovery. They recommended enhancing long-term competitiveness to support jobs and communities, including investing in the forest land base, implementing measures that encourage investment while protecting the environment, strengthening the participation of Indigenous peoples and communities, focusing on market and product diversification, supporting BC to become a global hub for expertise in low-carbon, green building, and maximizing value-added opportunities.

The Council, as well as Domtar Inc., emphasized that the industry's ability to secure access to fiber at a reasonable cost is at the core of the industry's challenges. Domtar Inc. indicated that there are opportunities to improve access by addressing cost-effectiveness, changing policies to increase utilization of fiber, and streamlining approvals. Improving cost competitiveness and fiber supply, in addition to investments in efficiency, diversification, innovation and commercialization, was also a priority for the BC Pulp and Paper Coalition.

The Private Forest Landowners Association encouraged the province to examine how private lands can be part of the solution to economic recovery from the pandemic. They requested support for business certainty for private forest lands by ensuring fair taxation for land classifications, ensuring regulatory stability, and providing fair access to domestic and international markets.

Committee Members also received recommendations from Conservation North with respect to second growth harvesting. They stated that transitioning from primary forests to second growth harvesting and supporting the development and promotion of wood products made with smaller, second-growth trees, would improve economic and ecological sustainability of communities and the ecological sustainability of forests.

Labour and Immigration

According to MOSAIC, employment among very recent immigrants fell by 23 percent between February and April this year, compared to 14 percent for those born in Canada. They attributed this difference to immigrants being more likely to work in industries, such as retail and hospitality, that have been particularly impacted by COVID-19. They noted that many immigrants are not well represented in sectors that are currently recruiting and will need supported referrals, training and re-skilling in order to enter and re-enter the labour market. They recommended funding dedicated to newcomer re-skilling programs to be jointly designed and delivered by newcomer-serving organizations and employers.

The BC Tech Association described constraints in the tech talent supply and how this is limiting job growth. They recommended a series of measures to increase this supply including looking to immigration, and specifically extending the Provincial Nominee Program Tech Pilot and increasing the allocation of Provincial Nominee Program spots for BC. The Association also suggested establishing a labour credit to bring Canadians home, increasing co-op placements, and establishing pilot programs to deliver online learning.

Health and safety in workplaces was another theme. The Manufacturing Safety Alliance of BC described how health and safety organizations are supporting businesses to navigate pandemic-related challenges by providing access to health and safety services, programs, and training. As the virus evolves, businesses will need to strengthen controls and adapt plans. Accordingly, they recommended government continue to fund the Sector Labour Market Partnerships program which has been helpful for identifying workplace development challenges, such as the need for qualified health and safety professionals.

The Committee also received submissions related to community benefits agreements. The Independent Contractors and Business Association of British Columbia recommended setting aside the BC Building Trades union requirement as it excludes a significant proportion of the BC construction industry from bidding on public projects. The BC Centre for Women in Trades noted that skilled trades careers provide living wages and benefits; however, women comprise less than five percent of the skilled trades workforce. They supported the use of community benefits agreements for existing and future projects, and ensuring public investments contribute to employment and upskilling opportunities, with a priority on hiring women, Indigenous peoples, and members of other equity groups. BC Building Trades similarly highlighted opportunities to use construction to create opportunities for local communities, displaced workers and other underrepresented groups through the recovery, and recommended expanding the development of major infrastructure projects built under community benefits agreements.

The New Car Dealers Association of BC and Automotive Retailers Association requested investments specifically in labour and skills training in the auto industry. They shared that vehicles have become more technologically complex, and that there is critical shortage of the skilled workers with the industry projecting it will need 20,000 workers in the next 10 years. The Automotive Retailers Association would also like to see certification made compulsory.

Liquified Natural Gas (LNG)

The BC LNG Alliance, Enbridge Inc. and the BC Chamber of Commerce discussed the importance of ensuring BC's fiscal and regulatory framework with respect to LNG supports competitiveness, investment, and market access. The BC Chamber of Commerce noted that the development and growth of LNG provides economic benefits for the province while also meeting the need for clean, reliable sources of energy for emerging economies. The BC LNG Alliance further pointed to jobs and contracts, many with Indigenous communities, associated with the LNG Canada and Coastal GasLink projects. Enbridge Inc. indicated that Canada could be the preferred global supplier of natural gas; however, regulatory uncertainty and an inability to get resources to market is resulting in Canada falling behind the US in this regard.

Opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through electrification in the natural gas sector were also highlighted by the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. They recommended enabling accelerated innovation, collaborative technology, infrastructure, and financing to be supportive of electrification, with a focus on making electrification options economical over the operating life of facilities, as well as encouraging deployment of other technologies with potential to reduce costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

Mining

The Association for Mineral Exploration British Columbia explained that mineral exploration and mining is one of BC's foundational industries with mineral explorers active and supporting the economy in all regions of the province. They recommended increasing the mining exploration and the mining flow-through share tax credits to position BC as the most attractive jurisdiction in Canada for mineral exploration investment. Increasing the rates would increase and leverage investments with modest cost implications. The Association also recommended creating a fund mandated to invest in homegrown mineral exploration companies that demonstrate high environmental, social and governance standards.

The Mining Association of British Columbia discussed the potential for mining to not only help BC's economic recovery and growth, but to also help with the transition to a low-carbon future. To help realize this potential, the Association recommends improving fiscal and regulatory conditions to enable the industry to compete and succeed in the global market, including ensuring timely decision-making, removing redundancies, and optimizing processes related to health, safety and environmental outcomes. They also suggested removing the PST from all production machinery and equipment used in mining operations and reducing upward pressure on electricity rates.

Natural Resource Development

Several organizations, including the BC Chamber of Commerce, the Independent Contractors and Business Association of British Columbia, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, described challenges with consultation, permitting and approval processes for natural resource development and how this has an impact on investment and access to global markets. They stated that BC is a resource driven economy, and that ensuring the viability of BC's resource sector will be a key component to recovery in the province. As such, they recommended reviewing and improving the regulatory process, in partnership with Indigenous peoples, the private sector and other stakeholders, to ensure clear timelines, efficiency, and certainty.

Geoscience BC requested long-term, sustainable funding for their organization, highlighting the role of public geoscience data for natural resource development. They also recommended funding for the British Columbia Geological Survey to enable collaboration between the two organizations to deliver on their complementary mandates. Increased funding for the British Columbia Geological Survey was also supported by the Association for Mineral Exploration British Columbia. They stated that this investment will improve the province's ability to produce large-scale mapping in prospective areas and further analyze the mineral potential of the province to inform policy and support land use decisions.

Métis Nation British Columbia discussed their interest in and need for capacity building to support partnering with resource companies to increase economic benefits for Métis people. They supported managing natural resource needs while stewarding natural resources based on respect for the land, and balancing economic, spiritual, ecological and traditional values of natural resources to meet the economic, social and cultural needs of Métis people and other Indigenous communities. Funding for broader capacity-building and program delivery to support job growth and successful business ventures was also of interest to Métis Nation British Columbia.

Research and Technology

The BC Tech Association described opportunities to shape the future of BC and improve international competitiveness of all its sectors by supporting science and technology adoption across the economy and throughout the province. They explained that the COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating a global shift to a digital economy, and firms in traditional industries that adopt digital technologies will be more competitive, sustainable and better positioned for this new economy and in their ability to handle future shocks. The Association noted that, by global standards, BC's economy structurally under-invests in research and development, and that companies have trouble scaling up and are much slower to commercialize; support is also needed to increase tech employment.

The Intellectual Property Institute of Canada advocated for programs to help businesses secure intellectual property rights, such as patents and trademarks. They pointed to a study by the Canadian Intellectual Property Office which showed a strong correlation between small- and medium-sized companies that own intellectual property rights and growth and commercial success. Noting that start-up companies and small businesses in BC were some of the fastest-growing and biggest job-creators prior to the pandemic, they were of the view that government programs and policies to support small businesses in this regard could help with recovery.

D-Wave Systems Inc. discussed innovation as a driver of economic recovery and highlighted quantum computing applications as a key example. They acknowledged the role of the new Quantum Algorithms Institute which will see Simon Fraser University collaborate with research universities across the province to devise quantum computing applications; however, a more holistic approach is required to promote the growth of the industry. They therefore recommended expanding the mandate of the Institute to include industry collaboration in order to generate employment opportunities and economic growth.

Rural Development

Northern Confluence Initiative explained that reliance on natural resource economies has created a long history of boom and bust cycles in northwest BC, and that northern economies require diversification to ensure environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being. They therefore recommended investing in sustainable community economic development to assist the region to have a more resilient rural economy by reviving the Rural Dividend Fund, and ensuring local contractors and resources are procured for infrastructure projects and economic development initiatives. Finning International similarly suggested working with rural and northern communities to ensure that the benefits of technology and innovation are felt around the province.

Tourism

Committee Members heard from several organizations, including the Tourism Industry Association of BC, about the critical need for immediate assistance and long-term recovery and stabilization for the tourism industry. Destination Greater Victoria shared that 22,000 of the 23,000 workers in the Greater Victoria visitor economy have been laid off, with some businesses looking at permanent severance decisions. The British Columbia Regional Tourism Secretariat shared that as of May 15, over 78,000 people have been laid off or not hired for the upcoming season; 51 percent of businesses are not open; 26 percent cannot operate under current physical distancing measures; and 21 percent are facing bankruptcy.

Many of these organizations described their efforts to create programs and task forces to help businesses navigate emergency support programs, and seek policy initiatives to ensure survival of the industry, noting that the sector is focused on a recovery strategy that sees the industry through the end of 2021. Cashflow and liquidity is the most significant issue, and recommended measures include grants, loans, subsidies or other financial supports to address solvency challenges, as well as funding to cover costs related to COVID-19 health and safety requirements. Salmon Arm Savings and Credit Union recommended government create a loan and/or grant program to be administered by local financial institutions with favourable interest terms to enable businesses to maintain operations until the next tourist season. Some organizations, including the British Columbia Regional Tourism Secretariat, further indicated that funding is needed for tourism capacity, infrastructure projects, product development and transportation infrastructure.

Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism highlighted challenges with restrictions on inter-provincial travel, and the impact on small communities in southeastern BC who usually welcome Albertans. They suggested focusing on an education-based travel message rather than restricting or discouraging travel by using 'SMART', an acronym for safe, measurable, appropriate, responsible and thoughtful travel. They also recommended changing the Resort Municipality Initiative to a rural municipality initiative to provide funding to more small communities for infrastructure such as signage, and Wi-Fi and other digital supports.

Conclusions

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been wide-ranging from small businesses to large operators and stretching into sectors such as arts and culture. Committee Members recognized that BC faces unprecedented economic challenges which will require a significant response, especially for the tourism sector. The Committee was strongly of the view that the tourism sector needs to be provided substantial, urgent support in the short-term combined with multi-year investments to ensure recovery and stabilization. Members particularly emphasized that solutions need to be multi-pronged, accessible, and flexible to meet the needs of the industry, recognizing that recovery will take a long time. Potential measures supported by the Committee included funding for pandemic-related costs such as personal protective equipment, infrastructure destination development, traditional and non-traditional financing options, and incentives for British Columbians to safely explore the province.

Agricultural capacity was another point of focus. The Committee acknowledged how the pandemic highlighted issues with food security and supply chains, and agreed on the importance of continuing to support local food production, processing and distribution hubs for growing and producing products for sale as well as assisting people in need. Committee Members noted that coordination and collaboration and leveraging local philanthropy, businesses, restaurants and grocery stores is key for receiving value and ensuring needs are met. They also recognized the importance of regional production, including farmers' markets and community gardens, to communities.

Another area of interest with respect to agriculture and agri-food was investments in infrastructure and applied innovation and agritech. Committee Members reflected on immediate challenges related to COVID-19, as well as issues with changing labour markets and climate change, and how farmers need to be supported with adapting and innovating. Given some of the risks for farmers, the Committee further supported a review of the AgriStability program to ensure it meets the needs of farmers and ranchers with respect to the level of support as well as administration and navigation of the program.

Other recommendations for agriculture related to investments in processing facilities and capacity and a multi-year extension of the Tree Fruit Replant program. The Committee also discussed policies and incentives to encourage farming and ensure farmland is used for farming as well as the value of the Buy BC program for increasing access to markets. Committee Members additionally expressed support for investment in the protection of domestic animals, livestock, and wildlife. They noted that organizations in this area, such as the BC SPCA, are experiencing revenue challenges due to a lack of donations and investment is needed to ensure they can fulfill their mandate.

As it relates to other natural resources, the Committee recognized that the challenges facing the forestry industry are complex and intersect with challenges around trade and global markets, and climate change. Members agreed that policies should be examined to ensure BC's forestry sector is competitive and is able to adapt and innovate while also providing bridging and retraining to affected workers. They also recommended exploring market and product diversification, with express support for Forest Innovation Investment, and a transition to second growth harvesting.

With respect to mining, the Committee was interested in making enhancements to mining tax credits to ensure they remain competitive. Committee Members acknowledged the value of exploration and how these credits attract investment and stimulate mining activity. They further recommended continued funding for the British Columbia Geological Survey and Geoscience BC, recognizing that both organizations are important for natural resource development, stimulating investment, and responsible land and resource management. The Committee also discussed the importance of continuing work on improving permitting and approval processes for natural resource development in consultation and collaboration with local and Indigenous communities, industry, and other stakeholders.

Recognizing the importance of airports for community connection and mobility, the Committee supported funding for the British Columbia Air Access program to improve airport infrastructure. Committee Members noted how the pandemic impacted services and the importance of small airports as a lifeline for rural and remote communities, especially during emergencies. They also recommended general investments in the aerospace sector, including the development of green technologies and the development of local supply chains.

Support for growth and innovation in the science and technology sector was another recommendation, particularly with respect to incenting scaling up, encouraging commercialization, and encouraging expansion of the sector to rural and remote communities. As it relates to rural and remote communities, the Committee further supported funding to community organizations for cultural, social and economic development in order to promote resiliency in rural and remote communities.

Committee Members also made recommendations to improve recruiting, training and retraining the skilled workforce. They noted that additional work is required to ensure BC's labour market is positioned to meet current and future needs. This includes working with the federal government on attracting and retaining skilled immigrants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Aerospace

25. Support research, development and innovation in BC's aerospace industry, including green technologies, and the creation of robust, local supply chains.
26. Increase funding for the British Columbia Air Access program to improve airport infrastructure and address challenges stemming from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in small, rural and remote communities.

Agriculture, Agri-Foods and Food Security

27. Review the AgriStability program to improve supports to farmers, including streamlining the administration of and supporting farmers with navigating the program.
28. Invest in infrastructure and applied innovation and agritech to help farmers adapt to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, and to adapt to changing labour markets.
29. Continue to explore investments in processing facilities and capacity in the province.
30. Develop policies that support agriculture productivity and regional production and collaborate with Indigenous governments in coordinating local producers, building capacity, creating space for community gardens, and supporting farmers' markets.
31. Continue to develop local food production, processing and distribution hubs, including investing in innovation and nutrition security, and prioritize funding for food security at the community and provincial level in emergency response planning, with the aim of improving food security and local agricultural capacity and productivity.
32. Provide a multi-year extension to the Tree Fruit Replant program to ensure stability and certainty.
33. Continue investing in the protection of domestic animals, livestock, and wildlife, including organizations such as the BC SPCA.

Forestry

34. Adopt policies and measures to encourage adaptation and innovation in the forestry sector, facilitate access to fiber, and support bridging and retraining of workers, in recognition of the ongoing evolving economic, global and environmental context.
35. Continue to explore market and product diversification in forestry by supporting economic incentives to drive investments into high-value products from the forest resource and providing ongoing support for Forest Innovation Investment.
36. Fund a transition to second growth harvesting and away from primary forests.

Labour and Immigration

37. Continue to fund the Sector Labour Market Partnerships program.
38. Improve measures, programs and policies for recruiting, training and retraining the skilled workforce required for BC's labour market, including working with the federal government on attracting and retaining skilled immigrants.

Mining

39. Examine making enhancements to the mining exploration and mining flow-through share tax credits to ensure BC remains globally competitive for mining exploration and investment.

Natural Resource Development

40. Continue funding the British Columbia Geological Survey and Geoscience BC.

Technology and Innovation

41. Support growth and innovation in BC's science and technology industry by exploring mechanisms to incent scaling up and commercialization, increase and retain the labour talent supply, and encourage expansion to rural and northern communities.

Rural Development

42. Provide funding to community organizations to support social, cultural and economic development and community resilience in rural, remote and northern communities.

Tourism

43. Provide urgent, targeted recovery funding that is accessible and flexible to the tourism sector, as well as supports to address pandemic-related costs such as personal protective equipment.
44. Support stabilization of the tourism sector with multi-year investments in recovery, infrastructure and destination development, and marketing, including exploring the provision of traditional and non-traditional financing options to tourism businesses, and incentives to British Columbians to stimulate safe provincial tourism and travel.

Environment

COVID-19

British Columbians shared how the pandemic amplified their appreciation of nature as they sought ways to sustain physical and mental well-being. Outdoor recreation and nature organizations similarly observed an increased use of parks and trails during the pandemic, noting that this activity has increased pressure on BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC. Other submissions highlighted how investing in climate change adaptation and resilience is important for ensuring BC recovers in a sustainable direction.

Survey Highlights

- Question 1 : Environment was 5th most common topic:
Key themes: address climate change and protect the environment, specifically ending the logging of old growth forests; increase investments outdoor recreation; and support renewable energy as well as environmental initiatives and incentives.
- Question 2: Invest in the transition to clean economy and reduce pollution received the 2nd most selections.
- Question 3: Building the clean economy received 10.6 cents.

Clean and Renewable Energy

Clean Energy Canada explained that to achieve BC's climate goals, the province's post-COVID economic recovery needs to put climate action at its centre. They recommended that all ministries with responsibilities for implementing the CleanBC plan remain fully funded to advance legislation, regulations and programs to ensure CleanBC remains on target. Similarly, the BC Sustainable Energy Association recommended government implement a 'green screen' – an objective and transparent assessment of a project's compatibility with the CleanBC plan and BC's legislated greenhouse gas emission reduction targets – for all infrastructure spending to ensure Clean BC targets are met.

Many submissions stressed the need to implement climate change adaptive strategies and climate resilient infrastructure. The Committee also heard from grade nine student Rebecca Wolf Gage about the importance of educating students in all schools, universities and industries on the effects of climate change to highlight the importance of taking action.

Clean Energy Association of British Columbia noted that more emphasis is needed on mobilizing technologies for electrification to transition away from fossil fuels. They explained that low-carbon electricity is one of BC's strengths, and through partnerships with the renewable energy industry, the province can create stable

jobs, and provide regional economic development opportunities for communities. The BC Chamber of Commerce explained that electrification is necessary to fully leverage BC's low-carbon economy, enhance competitiveness, and attract investment to the province to ensure a resilient economic recovery from the ongoing impacts of COVID-19. The Committee also received specific recommendations supporting the electrification of new transit and commuter rail.

Several submissions expressed continued support for reducing vehicle emissions by expanding rebates and investing in charging and grid infrastructure for zero-emission vehicles. The New Car Dealers Association of BC stated that range anxiety and accessibility of charging infrastructure are often cited as barriers to electric vehicle ownership. They pointed to BC's success to date in the adoption of electric vehicles and encouraged further funding for purchase incentives. Incentives for electric vehicle adoption was also supported by the Vancouver Electric Vehicle Association and Electric Mobility Canada.

A number of submissions discussed the energy efficiency of homes and buildings as another area for investment. They suggested expanding and increasing energy retrofit programs for public, private, commercial, and residential buildings and emphasized the need to introduce better programs to aid low-income households to improve energy efficiency.

Advanced Biofuels Canada discussed how investment in clean fuels can contribute to economic recovery, create good-paying stable jobs, and lead to durable, long-term clean growth. They noted that clean fuel use is the principle mechanism to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve the environmental performance of the transportation and industrial sectors. They recommended aligning the regulatory and taxation framework, including the carbon tax, to attract clean fuel capital investment. Similarly, Gitksan Development Corporation suggested aligning the carbon tax with the federal and other provincial carbon pricing systems to exempt biofuels from the tax. They explained that the current carbon tax design has led to increased clean fuel costs for consumers and slowed development of the clean fuel market.

The Committee also heard from the Canadian Geothermal Energy Association about the benefits of geothermal energy. They stated that geothermal energy projects can provide heat, food, and economic security to communities at a far lower cost to the economy, the environment, and people's health, than fossil fuels. They recommended incorporating geothermal energy into CleanBC and creating incentives and tax credits to encourage development of geothermal energy, particularly in rural and remote communities. They explained that these policy recommendations will provide the geothermal energy sector with the regulatory and fiscal aid needed to increase the use of geothermal energy.

The Canadian Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Association pointed out that hydrogen energy applications are growing rapidly around the world, attracting huge investment and business opportunities for hydrogen and fuel cell technology, products, and services. They stated that investment in this sector presents an opportunity for economic recovery as well as a way to reach BC's environmental goals. They acknowledged support and funding provided for the deployment of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles and recommended additional measures to further stimulate the deployment of hydrogen infrastructure and hydrogen fuel cell applications in BC.

The Committee also received suggestions for increased investment in solar energy, including directing BC Hydro to begin developing solar, tidal and wind energy generation and to facilitate and help finance solar roadway and solar roof technology in urban and rural areas.

Environmental Protection

Over 160 submissions supported the Ancient Forest Alliance's recommendation to protect old growth forests. Ancient Forest Alliance stated that resource management decisions have placed natural ecosystems, the services they provide and the well-being of British Columbians at risk. They proposed three priority funding programs that, in their view, will help the province achieve its stated goals related to recovery from COVID-19, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and improving old-growth forest management. The recommendations included: establishing a BC Natural Lands Acquisition Fund to purchase private lands of high conservation, scenic, cultural, and recreational value; funding for the planning, implementation, and management of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in BC; and investment in sustainable development and economic diversification of Vancouver Island First Nations communities in lieu of old-growth logging.

Fish and Wildlife Conservation and Management

The Committee heard from several organizations about the need for increased investment and regulations to protect fish and wildlife. The BC Wildlife Federation, a conservation organization that promotes the wise use of fish, wildlife and habitat, stated that BC's fish and wildlife management agencies have been understaffed and underfunded. They explained that this has resulted in more species, such as mountain caribou and Chilcotin and Thompson River steelhead, being classified as endangered or facing extinction. They also pointed to the mountain pine beetle epidemic, inadequate fire suppression methods, and climate change as having significant impacts on BC's forest ecosystem.

Several organizations, including the BC Wildlife Federation, and the Guide Outfitters Association of British Columbia, stressed the need to increase funding for fish and wildlife habitat conservation, protection and restoration to effectively manage the water and land that fish and wildlife require to prosper. The Spruce City Wildlife Association suggested that rent from natural resource users could be collected for fish and wildlife conservation. Along with the BC Wildlife Federation, Regions 7B and 5, they recommended directing fees from hunting and fishing to conservation and management.

The BC Chamber of Commerce shared that species-at-risk legislation has the potential to maintain and support the natural values of BC's eco-system while supporting the economic players that work within them. They stated that the approaches taken by both the federal and provincial governments in species-at-risk initiatives, such as those for orcas and caribou, have shown a lack of meaningful consultation with the business community. They recommended creating comprehensive species-at-risk legislation to protect and recover species, including prioritizing biodiversity and species preservation, in consultation with communities and sectors impacted by this legislation.

Invasive Species

Several invasive species organizations from across the province described the need for investments in invasive species prevention, monitoring, response, and outreach. Organizations such as the Invasive Species Council of BC, Invasive Species Council of Metro Vancouver, and the Lillooet Regional Invasive Species Society explained strong action on invasive species with corresponding long-term funding is required for invasive species management. This includes: the introduction and resourcing of legislation; action to prevent new introductions and establishment of new species; dedicated funding to support regional invasive species

programs to address key issues identified in the Invasive Species Strategy for BC; and investments in ground management of declining range forage and recreation trails.

The Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society emphasized the importance of closing high-risk pathways that introduce and spread invasive species, such as the pet and aquarium trade, horticultural trade, boating and water recreation, and tourism transport. The East Kootenay Invasive Species Council noted that closing or better managing pathways is vital to avoid new invasive species introductions and ongoing management costs. Many invasive species organizations suggested the implementation of stronger regulatory tools through legislation as a means of addressing and closing these pathways.

Natural Assets

The Municipal Natural Assets Initiative explained that there is increasing evidence that natural assets can provide equivalent services to engineered infrastructure, without capital costs, potentially lower operating expenses, with fewer carbon implications. They, along with the David Suzuki Foundation, advocated for investments in natural assets through: programs to help local governments inventory their natural assets, capital funding and grants to undertake projects to restore, rehabilitate and maintain natural assets; and support for the integration of Indigenous knowledge on natural and cultural assets into local government asset management systems. The Municipal Natural Assets Initiative also recommended analysis be a pre-condition for any provincial infrastructure funding to determine whether natural assets could provide the required services in whole or in part, as opposed to relying solely on engineered assets. They pointed out these recommendations would support CleanBC priorities, including working towards reconciliation, increasing carbon sequestration and mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, and improving places where people work.

The Municipal Natural Assets Initiative also shared that efforts to help communities recover and rehabilitate following the COVID-19 pandemic can be increased by accelerating natural infrastructure rehabilitation, restoration and management projects that deliver both short-term economic stimulus and long-term resilience.

Parks and Recreation

Several organizations, including International Mountain Bicycling Association of Canada and BC Nature, recommending increased funding for BC Parks. The Federation of Mountain Clubs of British Columbia noted that provincial parks are currently underfunded which has undermined the conservation and ecological function of park management, accessibility to parks and trails, and land management and planning. The Elders Council for Parks in British Columbia noted that BC Parks needs more capacity to mitigate the impacts of climate change and investments would bring increased tourism dollars to rural areas, offer affordable in-province vacations, support rural and Indigenous employment, and build robust biodiversity. The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, BC Chapter stated that underfunding of BC Parks has resulted in overcrowding in trails and facilities, limited monitoring and enforcement, unsafe work conditions for staff causing extreme stress and high turnover, and backlogs of maintenance projects and overdue management plans.

The Committee also received recommendations to increase funding for Recreation Sites and Trails BC. The Federation of Mountain Clubs of British Columbia explained that budget constraints and available resources have limited the ability of Recreation Sites and Trails BC to respond to the increased public demand for new facilities, upgraded facilities and maintenance needs, including addressing road maintenance, resulting in loss

of access to popular trails or restricted access. Along with Quad Riders ATV Association of BC, Trail Society of BC, International Mountain Bicycling Association of Canada, and the South Island Mountain Bike Society, they indicated that increased funding will help ensure quality trails, including trails for motorized vehicles, and proper maintenance. Quad Riders ATV Association also highlighted that investments in Recreation Sites and Trails BC can contribute to a resilient, sustainable economy by providing economic diversification to rural communities and allowing for an extended tourism season with a diversity of mixed-use trails. The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC stated that strategic investments in outdoor recreation have contributed to health, social cohesion, rural economic development, sustainable resource management, and Indigenous reconciliation.

Recycling and Waste

The Committee received several submissions advocating for waste reduction policies such as zero plastics regulations and composting programs. Conversely, 7-Eleven suggested maintaining COVID-19 controls in retail by postponing pending regulatory and environmental changes on single-use plastic packaging until 2021 to limit cost pressures on businesses and to allow businesses to maintain necessary health measures.

The Cement Association of Canada discussed opportunities to use combustible waste, such as tires and shingles to create alternative fuel. They stated that these materials often end up in the landfill but have an energy value that could be leveraged. They noted that a new category of combustible waste was added in the last budget which extends the carbon tax to wastes that could be used as alternative fuels. They recommended removing this application as waste-based fuels present an alternative to coal and natural gas, and therefore an additional opportunity to reduce the impact of greenhouse gas emissions. The Cement Association of Canada also highlighted issues with the application of the carbon tax on cement. They pointed out that imported cement is not subject to the tax, putting domestic suppliers at a disadvantage and resulting in a leakage of carbon, cement production, and tax revenue.

Water

Watersheds BC recommended creating a dedicated watershed security fund, noting that this would build resilience in communities by investing in people, infrastructure, and the natural resources of the province while also supporting local jobs. Our Water BC Network pointed out that a watershed security fund presents an opportunity to ensure the health and safety of drinking water sources, address the effects of climate change, restore fish habitat, and advance reconciliation.

The Committee also received submissions recommending investment in marine conservation areas. Nature United explained that the Marine Plan Partnership for the North Pacific Coast (MaPP) was collaboratively developed between 17 First Nations and the provincial government as the first large-scale marine planning initiative in BC. Coastal First Nations – Great Bear Initiative Society stated that support for MaPP implementation will build sustainable economies, healthy ecosystems, and reconciliation through collaboration. Similarly, the David Suzuki Foundation and Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, BC Chapter and West Coast Environmental Law described the need for funding for marine conservation initiatives for the monitoring and enforcement of protected areas.

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, BC Chapter and West Coast Environmental Law stated that the challenges facing BC's coast include declining biodiversity, intensifying climate change impacts, and increasing conflicts over resources. They recommended establishing a comprehensive provincial coastal strategy

in acknowledgement of the critical importance of the coast to BC's culture and economy. They further explained that a coastal strategy and law would enable the province to better deliver on its commitments to environmental protection, reconciliation and capacity-building, food security, coastal infrastructure, technology and innovation, and economic development.

Conclusions

The Committee acknowledged that as with the pandemic, climate change impacts certain groups more than others and the inequality created and advanced by climate change needs to be addressed. Committee Members particularly recognized the opportunity presented by the economic recovery to invest in climate change adaptation and sustainable policies. They reflected on the importance of sustaining investments in CleanBC and opportunities to build on existing policies and initiatives, including funding energy retrofits, and investing in renewable energy projects in rural areas. Members particularly focused on opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through greater electrification, incenting the adoption of zero-emissions vehicles as well as fuel-efficient vehicles in rural areas, and the use of a climate lens on provincial infrastructure projects. The importance of educating students on the effects of climate change was also a key point of their discussions.

The Committee continued to emphasize the threat of invasive species to BC's environment and economy as well as the increased risk created by gaps in border oversight due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Committee Members agreed with invasive species organizations that increased funding is needed for education, prevention, monitoring, response, and enforcement to address this threat. They also noted that action in this area could be a key source of jobs as part of the pandemic recovery.

Fish and wildlife conservation and management was another area acknowledged by the Committee as requiring increased funding for conservation, management, and data collection measures. Committee Members also noted that fees from hunting, fishing, natural resource and nature-based tourism enterprises could be potential revenue sources for conservation and management efforts. Additionally, they voiced support for prioritizing biodiversity to recover and protect species.

With regards to parks and recreation, Committee Members noted the need for increased funding to help BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC address a backlog of maintenance and understaffing as well as new pressures such as oversight of public health and safety created by increased usage. They also highlighted the important contributions of volunteer groups in this field.

Water sustainability and watershed protection was another area of focus for Committee Members. They recognized the need to advance water sustainability in British Columbia by providing a dedicated, sustainable, annual funding source. This funding could be directed to Indigenous communities, local governments, local watershed protections agencies, farmers, ranchers, and stakeholders to establish community partnerships on water stewardship. The Committee also noted that BC's coastal communities are facing declining biodiversity, intensifying climate change impacts, and increasing conflicts over resources, and were supportive of conservation efforts for coastal communities.

The Committee also encouraged the continued exploration of natural assets by local governments, specifically as a tool for economic recovery, and advancing CleanBC goals such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reconciliation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Clean and Renewable Energy

45. In recognition of the opportunity to use economic recovery to invest in climate action, ensure the CleanBC plan remains fully funded to advance legislation, regulations and programs to meet the established targets, including expanding and enhancing energy efficiency programs and continuing to support reductions in vehicle emissions.
46. Continue to explore opportunities for clean energy solutions, such as hydrogen, geothermal, solar, and bio fuels, including attracting private investment and technology and ensuring competitiveness, collaborating with Indigenous communities and other governments, creating partnerships with industry and universities on commercialization, incenting rural investment, and creating a stable policy framework.
47. Continue to use a climate lens for all infrastructure spending to provide an objective and transparent assessment of a project's compatibility with the CleanBC plan and BC's legislated greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.
48. Maintain a commitment to a cost-effective and predictable path to electrification in collaboration with industry.

Fish and Wildlife Conservation and Management

49. Increase funding for fish and wildlife conservation, management and data collection, including exploring potential revenue sources such as fees from hunting, fishing, natural resource and nature-based tourism enterprises for this purpose.
50. Prioritize biodiversity and species preservation to protect and recover species, in consultation with communities, Indigenous peoples and the business sector.

Invasive Species

51. Provide robust funding for education, prevention, monitoring, response and enforcement, including streamlining regulations to better monitor and manage high-risk pathways that introduce and spread invasive species, and ensuring an aggressive remediation process.

Parks and Recreation

52. Increase operational funding for BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC to support staffing, monitoring and enforcement, maintenance, land management planning, oversight of public health and safety, and recreational infrastructure and services, including promoting and supporting volunteer efforts.

Water

53. Advance water sustainability in British Columbia by providing a dedicated, sustainable, annual funding source.

Fiscal and Regulatory Policy

COVID-19

Throughout the consultation, the Committee heard appreciation for the broad range of measures taken by all levels of government to support British Columbians through the pandemic; however, gaps with existing programs and the need for ongoing support were also highlighted. Providing financial relief was particularly stressed as businesses continue to face challenges with decreased revenues and increased costs as a result of the pandemic.

The need for emergency funding for local governments was also a key theme. Local governments described how the pandemic has negatively impacted their finances and revealed challenges with their funding models. They described steep declines in revenue and additional costs to implement public safety measures and expressed concerns about the risks of default on property tax payments.

Survey Highlights

- Question 4: Increase corporate income tax received the highest number of selections, followed by increase consumption taxes, including PST and the carbon tax, reduce or eliminate existing programs, and increase property-based taxes.
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Budgetary and Taxation Policy

Several organizations commented on different goals and approaches to BC's budgetary and taxation framework. Some, such as the BC Council of Forest Industries and the Independent Contractors and Business Association of British Columbia, encouraged a focus on competitiveness to attract investment and support job creation. TELUS recommended reviewing recent tax changes for their impact on business, stating that increases in taxes and other costs end up being passed on to consumers or diverted from investments in capital budgets.

Other submissions discussed opportunities to analyze the taxation structure from a progressive lens with Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia specifically recommending a review of tax exemptions and credits. The BC Government and Service Employees' Union encouraged further changes to marginal income tax rates as well as an examination of a national tax on wealth and assets.

The BC Centre for Women in the Trades emphasized the importance of integrating gender-based analysis plus in policy development for advancing gender equity and enhancing progress for women. They particularly stressed how critical this lens is to economic recovery and government spending in order to address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and other equity-seeking groups.

Co-operatives

The BC Co-operative Association made several recommendations aimed at growing co-operatives. They explained that co-operatives are a beneficial model for promoting community resilience and engagement, noting that co-operatives emerged as a response to economic upheaval with support for workers and community, rather than profit maximization, a central principle. They were of the view that co-operatives can help address long-term economic stability, climate change, and reconciliation.

COVID-19 Measures and Recovery

The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade described challenges for businesses with eligibility and access to government programs and the need for an enhanced provincial role to bridge the gap with federal programs. The Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver specifically discussed the federal Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistant program which helps commercial tenants with rent reductions and deferrals and interest-free loans; they indicated that even with the program, some tenants are still unable to pay rent. Mortgage Professionals Canada recommended continuing supports, such as the BC emergency benefit for workers, the temporary rent supplement, and the deferral of hydro and ICBC payments.

Several organizations advocated for financial relief through delayed tax increases, temporary tax breaks, and new tax credits. The Williams Lake and District Chamber of Commerce recommended implementing a temporary tax break for the PST, employer health tax and the hotel tax, noting that many small businesses are on the brink of bankruptcy. The Retail Council of Canada suggested refundable tax credits for renovations and personal protective equipment to lessen the cost impact of protecting British Columbians from COVID-19. Other organizations recommended providing direct funding in the form of grants and loans to support businesses while the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade recommended reducing the layering of taxes to enable businesses to recover, rehire employees, and stimulate economic activity. Referring to the need for better protections for workers in hard-hit sectors, UNITE HERE Local 40 was of the view that financial relief measures should be contingent upon employers bringing back laid-off workers.

The Canadian Credit Union Association stated that gaps persist with existing government programs as some sectors are not able to make digital or other adjustments and are therefore disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and that these sectors require tailored solutions to be able to manage over an extended period of time. They recommended creating a low- or zero-interest, government-secure loan, which is partially forgivable and targeted to support these sectors through the end of 2021.

The Chartered Professional Accountants of British Columbia described opportunities to build off of pandemic support services for small- and medium-sized businesses, particularly with respect to encouraging businesses to implement new technologies. They noted the importance of being strategic with government investments and indicated that such measures would help boost productivity. The Chartered Professionals in Human Resources of British Columbia and Yukon recommended assisting small- and medium-sized enterprises with the recovery by providing human resources management support.

Some organizations spoke specifically to approaches for recovery with the South Island Prosperity Partnership describing it as an opportunity for building a more resilient economy and ensuring economic reconciliation. They stated that embedding reconciliation in recovery approaches going forward will generate self-sustaining, multi-generational wealth for Indigenous communities.

The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade emphasized the importance of health and safety for customers and employees to enable businesses to get back to work. They noted that building confidence and ensuring measures are economically viable is key, and that the province should proactively work with different sectors to develop better certainty and guidance around public health requirements and workplace guidelines.

Metro Vancouver suggested supporting economic recovery with co-investments and partnerships with local governments and the federal government on infrastructure projects. The Independent Contractors and Business Association of British Columbia also recommended infrastructure stimulus, including prioritizing infrastructure projects in the \$5 million to \$50 million range for early funding, as a means to expedite economic recovery.

Employer Health Tax

Several organizations expressed continued concerns about the structure of the employer health tax and its impact on businesses, with recommendations to amend thresholds to exempt more businesses and to review the tax altogether. The BC Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business recommended increasing the base payroll exemption threshold from \$500,000 to at least \$1 million and indexing the payroll exemption thresholds to inflation; the Canadian Federation of Independent Business suggested making this change for 2020 and 2021 with a view to evaluating the impact of increasing the threshold. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business further suggested aligning the payment dates of the tax with workers' compensation payments to minimize the administrative burden of the tax as well as exploring other models of paying for health care costs that better splits it between businesses and residents. The Prince George Chamber of Commerce encouraged government to review the employer health tax in light of the impact of COVID-19 on businesses.

Infrastructure Funding

The Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association recommended the province leverage the life and health insurance industry's investment capacity to expand and accelerate long-term infrastructure projects and create more opportunities for insurers to invest in assets and projects that meet sustainability goals. They shared that Canadian life insurers are leading sources of long-term financing for infrastructure development and can help BC modernize its infrastructure and make the economy more productive and competitive. They also stated that the life and insurance industry is well-positioned to support a transition to a lower carbon economy through its investment portfolio with insurers already taking steps to increase investments in products and assets that meet sustainability criteria.

Insurance Premium Tax

The Insurance Bureau of Canada recommended eliminating the insurance premium tax as this would provide financial relief as well as help address affordability challenges for strata corporations. They stated that tax makes insurance products more expensive and reduces capacity for businesses, employers and individuals to obtain insurance products as it directly increases its costs. This view was also expressed by the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association who recommended reducing and eventually eliminating the tax. They shared that public health care costs, including long-term care costs, and the need for disability insurance protection is rising significantly, and reducing and eliminating the tax would encourage employers and individuals to maintain or expand life and health insurance protection for their employees and families.

Lending

The BC Chamber of Commerce advocated for raising the lending cap for credit unions from 30 percent to 35 percent to enable credit unions to participate prudently and equitably in business lending. They stated that raising the cap would increase competition and enable BC businesses to have more options with respect to obtaining financing. It will also enable businesses to work with a financial institution with a stronger understanding of local economic conditions as in many communities, credit unions are the only bricks and mortar financial institution.

Liquor, Cannabis and Tobacco

The Committee heard from several organizations how temporary measures and expedited processes implemented during the pandemic should be extended and modelled. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business stated that the recovery period from COVID-19 will be long and go beyond the summer of 2020, and that continuing with innovative ideas will strengthen local economies. They specifically recommended extending the COVID Temporary Extension Application for licensed establishments beyond October 31, 2020 and allowing restaurants, bars and tourism operators to purchase at wholesale prices beyond March 31, 2021.

The Convenience Industry Council of Canada requested specific measures to support retailers, including allowing alcohol and CBD product sales as well as increased lottery commissions. They stated that retailers are facing the challenge of significant decreases in revenue and daily customers combined with additional costs associated with maintaining physical distancing, cleaning and sanitation, personal protective equipment, and the installation of physical barriers, and that opening up new revenue streams could help address these challenges. 7-Eleven Canada also supported enabling convenience retailers to sell beer and wine as a means to support retail recovery, as well as changes to restrictions on products, display, advertising and taxation to ensure a level playing field for all vape product retailers.

Imperial Tobacco Canada recommended the province avoid implementing tax increases during the pandemic recovery period and pursue new taxation models with annual tax increases tied to inflation starting in 2022. They were of the view the province's efforts would be better focused on illegal tobacco enforcement which would deliver more tax revenue than tax increases and address a threat to public safety. The company also requested a pause on non-urgent regulations to avoid supply issues as industries adjust to supply chain pressures resulting from the pandemic. They further encouraged a reassessment of potential regulations with respect to vapour products to avoid duplication with federal efforts in this area.

Luxury Tax

The New Car Dealers Association of BC made several recommendations for changes to the luxury tax, including eliminating it from essential vehicles for British Columbians. They noted that it applies to many pick-up trucks and work trucks; however, it does not apply to luxury items such as jewelry. They further noted that the tax has resulted in a decrease in PST flowing to BC as purchases are made in other jurisdictions. Global Automakers of Canada also supported a change to the luxury tax, namely raising the qualifying level from to \$100,000. They stated that the current threshold of \$55,000 does not account for the cost of technology, lighter body materials and safety systems which increase the costs of modern vehicles.

Local Governments

The Committee received several recommendations related to providing emergency relief to local governments who are facing cash-flow challenges due to drops in revenue and additional public safety costs. Metro Vancouver described how maintaining core services is a challenge and that demand for core services, such as drinking water and water treatment, did not decrease, and that economic recovery will require co-investment and partnerships with other levels of government. The City of Prince George discussed specific impacts of the pandemic on finances as well as services such as public transit and noted that local governments across Canada are facing a near-term gap of \$10-15 billion. The City of Vancouver requested operating grants to address revenue losses, pointing to an estimated financial impact of \$163 million attributed to non-tax revenues such as parking and program fees not being recovered and additional costs for the city.

Some submissions also touched on the local government funding model, noting how the pandemic has highlighted long-standing challenges and issues for local governments. They recommended pursuing reform and exploring other models of taxation to provide local governments with a broader range of funding tools to address financial pressures related to infrastructure, climate change and other issues.

The City of Terrace and BC Chamber of Commerce brought attention to specific funding challenges for rural and remote communities. The Mayor of Terrace highlighted how industrial development brings some benefits to local businesses in hub cities but does not generate revenue while placing additional demand on services and growth-related pressures, including housing. She recommended examining how industrial projects can better benefit hub communities as well as following through on an agreement to provide northwest communities with a fair share of revenue. The BC Chamber of Commerce focused on the property tax system and how it no longer reflects the modern economy which is increasingly based on services, technology, and utilities that may be located outside the jurisdiction of rural and remote communities. They recommended working with communities to develop and negotiate predictable transfers to maintain services and amenities in rural and remote communities.

The Committee also heard from one organization advocating for governance changes in the Capital Regional District. The Grumpy Taxpayer\$ of Greater Victoria, a citizens' advocacy group, was of the view that local government in the region is inefficient and costly with 13 municipalities, three electoral districts, a regional district, and multiple fire departments and police forces for a population of 418,000. They acknowledged that the province released the *Capital Integrated Services Governance Initiative* report in 2017 as a blueprint to shared services and cost savings in the region; however, there has been limited progress.

Prompt Payment

The BC Construction Association and the Electrical Contractors Association of British Columbia continued to urge the implementation of prompt payment legislation. They explained that delays in payment negatively impact cash flow for construction companies and forces employers into further debt, and that such legislation would eliminate unnecessary and unfair delays in payment for work by requiring payment within a set timeframe. The Electrical Contractors Association of British Columbia stated that this legislation is standard in the United States and in several Canadian provinces, with Ontario serving as a potential model for BC.

Conversely, the Canadian Home Builders' Association of British Columbia advised against implementing prompt payment legislation. In their view, the *Builders Lien Act* already enforces compliance when there are

problems with timely payment and expressed concerns about a one-size-fits-all approach that would apply the same rules to small residential companies and multi-billion dollar public infrastructure projects.

Property Tax

The BC Chamber of Commerce highlighted gaps between non-residential and residential property taxes, and how this affects the ability of businesses to compete and remain viable. They pointed to the difference between residential and non-residential taxes and their view that these are misaligned with the costs of providing services. They recommended examining the property tax model with the goal of developing a more sustainable structure.

The Chamber, along with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, also linked challenges with property taxes for businesses specifically to the assessment practice of using the highest and best use. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business described how many commercial properties in Metro Vancouver have experienced a significant increase in value, and how this has resulted in increasing property tax bills for many business owners. They proposed a variety of measures to address this issue, including providing more details about valuation and assessment appeals, allowing local governments to offer targeted property tax relief, and allowing local governments to create a property tax sub-class for the development potential portion of commercial properties at a lower rate. The BC Chamber of Commerce similarly supported a sub-class, as well as an exemption to the highest and best use approach for long-standing businesses. Reviewing the practice of highest and best use was also supported by the Surrey Board of Trade and LandlordBC.

Provincial Sales Tax (PST)

The Resource Municipalities Coalition continued to bring attention to issues with PST compliance by non-resident companies. They described how non-resident companies, particularly those from Alberta, are not paying PST, making it difficult for BC-based companies to be competitive. They noted that non-resident companies may be unaware of the PST obligations or may be choosing not to comply with requirements. They therefore recommended providing education, collecting data, and enhancing the ability of the Ministry of Finance to enforce requirements to reduce non-compliance.

The Retail Council of Canada brought attention to similar issues with respect to non-resident e-commerce entities. They explained that many sell to British Columbians without charging and remitting the PST; they also often charge and pay no eco-fees even though their packaging enters the BC recycling system. The Council further highlighted how increased online sales during the pandemic have significantly benefited non-resident retailers with lower property and labour costs. They encouraged a level playing field for BC-based retailers by enhancing the collection of the PST and eco-fees from non-resident entities from outside Canada.

The Committee also received recommendations for BC to shift to a value-added tax system. The BC Chamber of Commerce explained that such a shift would address issues with the administrative burden and inefficiencies of the PST and enhance BC's competitiveness and productivity.

Regulatory Environment

Several organizations made broad recommendations related to regulatory approaches and ensuring that costs and burden on businesses are minimized. The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade suggested instituting

a formal process where businesses and associations could propose regulatory changes. They stated that such a feedback mechanism would enable real-time input and reduce the risk of implementing policies that could make it more difficult for businesses to operate while also facilitating a speedy and effective economic recovery. They pointed to collaborative changes implemented during the pandemic, such as easing regulations to expand patios and extending temporary layoff times, as examples.

The Convenience Industry Council of Council encouraged continued efforts on red tape reduction in partnership with local governments. They were of the view that regulation on small businesses across all levels of government is compounded and results in significant financial costs. They also recommended producing an economic impact analysis prior to implementing new laws or regulations affecting small businesses, including engaging in consultation to ensure regulations are necessary, efficient, and effective.

The Williams Lake and District Chamber of Commerce and the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association suggested a moratorium on new regulations and policies. The Association stated that applying this broadly within government would help facilitate recovery and support competitiveness.

Conclusions

Economic recovery was a key focus of the Committee's discussions as Members recognized that the province faces significant uncertainty and challenges in the weeks, months, and years ahead. They appreciated that programs and emergency funding were rolled out quickly due to the urgent need to respond to the pandemic. They also recognized that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women, and vulnerable and marginalized communities, as well as varying impacts on different sectors. They were of the view that emergency funding needs to be transitioned to provide targeted investments in recovery and financial relief based on these individual and sectoral needs. Continuing to identify and address gaps, consulting stakeholders, and proactively ensuring the voices of those who risk being left behind are at the table was also emphasized. The Committee further encouraged continued partnership with the federal government on programs and measures to support British Columbians through the pandemic.

Committee Members reflected on the opportunity to close gaps by responding differently to the pandemic and embedding in the recovery and the broader budgetary framework reconciliation, equity, and climate change lenses. They also discussed the importance of supporting businesses, especially small businesses, as well as supporting and encouraging British Columbians to enter and re-enter the workforce, and remaining competitive with other Canadian jurisdictions for investment. Investments in a broad range of public infrastructure, beyond large infrastructure projects, was another point of focus. The Committee noted that many smaller, community-based projects can have a wide impact on people and communities.

The Committee also discussed challenges that some local governments are facing due to the pandemic. Members noted that while local governments need support, there are also opportunities to encourage local governments to be creative and to leverage existing financial tools. At the same time, Committee Members acknowledged vulnerabilities within the local government funding model and financing structure and recommended pursuing reform.

Extending some pandemic-related measures was another point of discussion. The Committee noted that the restaurant and hospitality industry welcomed measures permitting them to purchase liquor at wholesale prices. With uncertainty around the pandemic, its impact on industry operations, and how the industry will need to continue to adjust and adapt to the pandemic. Committee Members were of the opinion that

extending this specific measure could have a significant positive impact on the restaurant and hospitality industry.

The Committee also examined issues around specific taxation measures. With respect to the PST, Committee Members recognized issues with compliance on non-resident companies, whether this is related to non-BC companies working in BC or e-commerce. They discussed how non-compliance places local businesses at a disadvantage and recommended increasing monitoring and compliance. As it relates to the luxury tax, they agreed that the thresholds need to be reviewed given how it is applied to pick-up trucks and essential work vehicles, noting that the tax has not kept up with inflation or changes to vehicle design and technology. Committee Members were also interested in opportunities to temporarily adjust the employer health tax with a view to supporting businesses during the pandemic, such as with continued deferrals or temporary forgiveness or reductions.

Other recommendations in fiscal and regulatory policy related to creating opportunities for investing in and growing co-operatives, in recognition of their social and community benefits, and exploring the implementation of prompt payment legislation while being cognizant of potential unintended consequences of a one-size fits all approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Budgetary and Taxation Policy

54. Ensure the budgetary and taxation framework is prudent and responsive, supports competitiveness, and proactively incorporates equity, reconciliation and climate action lenses to address short- and long-term challenges for individuals and businesses.

Co-operatives

55. Create opportunities to invest in and develop co-operatives by reviewing and implementing necessary taxation and regulatory changes.

COVID-19 Measures & Recovery

56. Continue to work with the federal government to ensure that federal and provincial programs to support individuals and businesses through the pandemic are responsive, including attaining the necessary transfers, identifying and addressing gaps, and transitioning emergency funding to targeted investments in recovery and financial relief based on individual and sectoral needs.
57. Ensure that economic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is embedded in recovery going forward to create multi-generational wealth and self-sustaining economies.

Employer Health Tax

58. Review opportunities to temporarily adjust the employer health tax in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses.

Infrastructure Funding

59. Invest in a broad base of public infrastructure that facilitates equitable recovery, such as road building and public transit, as well as a diverse range of smaller projects in local communities, parks and schools.

Liquor, Cannabis and Tobacco

60. Extend the initiative to allow restaurants, bars and tourism operators to purchase liquor at wholesale prices.

Local Governments

61. Pursue municipal finance reform to provide municipalities with a broader range of sustainable, predictable and reliable funding tools in order to address increasing financial pressures related to a growing asset base, aging infrastructure, climate change, housing challenges and the opioid crisis.

Luxury Tax

62. Review the luxury tax threshold for vehicles to eliminate its application on pick-up trucks and essential work vehicles.

Prompt Payment

63. Examine implementing prompt payment legislation.

Provincial Sales Tax (PST)

64. Increase monitoring and enforcement of BC tax laws and consider implementing public reporting for the payment of the PST by non-resident companies working in BC.

Health Care

COVID-19

The pandemic has had a wide-ranging impact on BC's health care sector as professionals, service providers, organizations, and researchers all pivoted to respond and adapt. It also revealed many gaps and challenges, and opportunities to make significant improvements, in the provision of health care services, particularly with respect to long-term care. Charities and non-profit organizations highlighted their struggles to stay operational due to the financial impact of the pandemic on their organizations.

British Columbians also described the direct impacts on access to care, including backlogs for surgeries and treatments, and a lack of access to services and facilities, such as pools, fitness centres and massage therapy, that assist with health and relief of symptoms. Some emphasized that for British Columbians with diseases that are progressing more quickly, their final months are spent alone at home, physically and socially distant from friends and family. Deteriorating mental and emotional health was another major concern.

The value of digital health was also stressed. Several organizations described how the pandemic accelerated the shift to digital health and provided benefits with respect to maintaining and improving access to care. They also acknowledged that gaps in connectivity, especially in rural and remote communities, continue to limit its adoption across the province.

Survey Highlights

- Question 1: Health care was the 4th most common topic.
Key themes: expand mental health and addiction supports; address the opioid epidemic; invest in community and seniors care; and improve access and reduce wait times.
 - Question 2: Improve physical and mental health supports and programs for all workers received the 4th most selections; Invest in health care and emergency preparedness against possible future waves of COVID-19 received the 6th most selections.
 - Question 3: Mental health and addictions received 9.8 cents; Health received 9.2 cents.
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Charitable and Non-Profit Sector

Health care charities and non-profit organizations, including the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and the Canadian Cancer Society, stressed the significant impact the pandemic has had on their finances. They shared how their organizations are dependent upon donations which have dropped, leaving them in precarious situations. Some indicated that they are not supported by emergency programs and subsidies as they do not meet the criteria. They also informed the Committee that these financial challenges will impact their ability to provide supports and services that are critical to British Columbians, and that their organizations require stabilization funding to survive. Several organizations further suggested creating a donation matching program and doubling the charitable donation tax credit to encourage more British Columbians to donate to help address these challenges.

Communicable Diseases

Several presenters and submissions highlighted the importance of ongoing investments in public health to address the pandemic and prepare for future waves, highlighting both the health and the economic impact of measures taken to date. Some organizations, such as the Hospital Employees' Union, focused on the provision of an adequate and safe supply of personal protective equipment for health care workers. Citadel Speech and Language Services highlighted the importance of ensuring that personal protective equipment meets the needs of those who are deaf and hard-of-hearing (e.g. masks with clear panels), who may feel a greater sense of isolation because masks impact their ability to hear speakers clearly and eliminates their ability to read lips.

The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada discussed opportunities for pharmacies to play a greater role in delivering services such as serology testing and the influenza vaccine. They stated that pharmacies can administer point-of-care tests, interpret test results, and can communicate information to public health through the drug claims system and through PharmaNet, and are therefore well-positioned to increase access to serology testing. With respect to the influenza vaccine, they noted that pharmacies already administer most influenza vaccines in BC. The Association shared their views on opportunities to improve cost-effectiveness and efficiency by modernizing distribution through the pharmacy supply chain and expanding the role of pharmacies to administer the vaccine to maximize uptake while allowing public health clinics to focus on other priorities.

The Committee also heard about the role of primary care in the pandemic response. REACH Community Health Centre described how they implemented a triaged care approach within their urgent and primary care network, and how they addressed the social determinants of health in ensuring patients are knowledgeable and able to comply with the recommendations of public health officials. They emphasized that increased investment in primary care and community health centres can support BC's pandemic preparedness and address inequities which make specific communities more vulnerable to poor health outcomes.

Chronic and Complex Diseases

A number of organizations and individuals made recommendations for supports and services related to chronic and complex diseases. British Columbians with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) described weakness and gaps in the provision of care for British Columbians living with ALS, noting issues related to staffing, wait times and access to the ALS Clinic at GS Strong. They recommended investments in research,

coverage of specific therapies, supports and services provided through the ALS Society of BC, and multi-disciplinary services.

The Arthritis Society, BC and Yukon Division, requested increased access to arthritis-specific primary and community care with specialized and subspecialized services. They stated that a team-based model of care is important for individuals with arthritis who may require the service of occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, rheumatologists, nurse practitioners, and general practitioners. They also recommended working with stakeholders to reduce wait times for hip and knee replacements as arthritis is the leading cause of joint replacement.

The Brain Injury Alliance recommended a permanent, annual allocation for the Alliance to provide grants for the delivery of essential services to individuals living with brain injury. They shared that current grant funding from government ends in 2020, and that this funding is distributed to community organizations to deliver services at no charge. Their request was supported by multiple community brain injury organizations who described the positive impact of their services on the wellness of those living with brain injury and their families.

Committee Members also received recommendations related to cancer prevention and care. Merck Canada Inc. stressed the importance of expanding public health efforts to limit future costs associated with cancer care through investments in HPV vaccination and general health system preparedness. They also highlighted the need to address the backlog in urgent cancer care due to the pandemic. The Canadian Cancer Society requested funding for their Travel Treatment Fund which provides low-income British Columbians with financial assistance to cover travel expenses for medical cancer care. They noted that the fund is an integrated part of BC's health care system; however, the organization can no longer afford to offer it due to financial challenges associated with the pandemic.

In a presentation to the Committee, Sage Stobbe, a volunteer advocate with JDRF Canada, recommended funding to cover constant glucose monitoring and flash glucose monitoring devices for individuals living with Type 1 diabetes. She explained that Type 1 diabetes is a life-threatening autoimmune disease that cannot be treated with diet and exercise and described how the constant glucose monitoring device positively impacted her quality of life by enabling better management of the disease. Diabetes Canada also recommended funding for glucose monitoring devices, noting that they provide a more complete picture of blood glucose which can lead to better short- and long-term treatment decisions and outcomes. In discussing the need to reduce the burden of diabetes on British Columbians on the health care system, they further recommended creating a diabetes strategy, covering the costs of offloading devices, and improving access to insulin pumps and diabetes medication.

The BC Epilepsy Society made several recommendations for supports and treatment for British Columbians living with epilepsy, including funding for system navigators, expanding programs, creating an epilepsy ketogenic diet program, creating new neuropsychologist positions, covering specific medications, and increasing public awareness. They noted that pharmaceutical interventions do not control seizures for many individuals living with epilepsy; however, access to alternative therapies, such as brain surgery, brain stimulators and a ketogenic diet, are currently limited in BC.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, BC and Yukon Division, discussed a need to improve supports for individuals living with multiple sclerosis, particularly with respect to individuals in long-term care and those receiving supports at home. Noting issues highlighted by the pandemic, they explained the importance of

ensuring age-appropriate considerations are made for individuals with multiple sclerosis in long-term care and further suggested that COVID-19 supports for Choices in Supports for Independent Living employers continue. As with many other chronic and complex diseases, they also drew attention to new therapies and treatments awaiting approval and coverage by the province.

Limited access to specific therapies was also a key theme for the Parkinson Society British Columbia. They noted that Deep Brain Stimulation and Duodopa therapy can be used to managed progressive symptoms, alleviate pain and severe disablement for individuals with Parkinson's disease; however, there are long waitlists. The Society recommended supporting individuals to access Deep Brain Stimulation in other provinces until capacity improves in BC and removing the cap on the number of individuals who can receive Duodopa therapy.

The IBD Centre of BC advocated for funding to establish a physical facility in BC to serve patients with inflammatory bowel disease. They shared how they would like to better address both the medical and mental health needs of patients across the province; however, they require funding for a centre from which to run operations, including telemedicine.

The Committee also heard from the ME/FM Society of BC on the need for supports for individuals living with myalgic encephalomyelitis. They stated that there is limited medical education, knowledge and research funding about the disease; one individual with myalgic encephalomyelitis also highlighted the wait time to get into the Chronic Complex Disease Clinic. The Society recommended launching an education campaign, fast-tracking billing codes, and making virtual care accessible, as well as financial support for those living with myalgic encephalomyelitis.

Community Care and Seniors

A key theme in presentations and submissions related to seniors' care was how the pandemic drew attention to long-standing issues within the sector, and how this presents an opportunity for reform. The BC Government and Service Employees' Union referenced issues related to precarity and compensation of the seniors' care workforce and expressed support for the recent implementation of the single-site order. They also recommended broader investments in the workforce, including education and training, health and safety protections, improvements to standards of care, and equitable wages.

The Hospital Employees' Union focused on compensation in discussing workforce, and recruitment and retention within the sector. They described several challenges related to a lack of standard compensation, including differences in pay and benefits, pension, and sick leave. They, along with the BC Health Coalition, suggested continuing with the enhancements to employment standards, such as the levelling of wages, implemented due to the pandemic and re-establishing a common labour standard across the sector.

Staffing was also a key concern for the BC Care Providers Association & EngAge BC. They shared that BC's community care sector will be among the fastest growing over the next decade due to an aging population. Accordingly, they recommended funding for a comprehensive industry-led human resources strategy for the sector that includes expanding access to education, promoting awareness of quality job opportunities in the sector, streamlining the credential recognition process for internationally educated professionals, and improving safety for workers.

Save Our Northern Seniors discussed challenges related to staffing levels. They stated that much of the health care workforce in BC is considered casual, and this impacts consistency and the transfer of patient

information. They also noted that the Seniors Advocate recommends 3.47 hours of direct care per resident; however, the current ratio is 3.36. The organization suggested providing training in the community to enable those who would otherwise not have the opportunity or resources to pursue training do so, thereby increasing staffing levels.

Another area of interest for Save Our Northern Seniors was capital funding. They presented priorities for additional assisted living and dementia care spaces in Fort St. John, noting the number of people in hospital and in the community waiting for placement and the expected increase in demand as the population ages. North Peace Seniors Housing Society recommended providing grants and interest-free mortgages to non-profits or individuals willing to provide community-style seniors housing in rural areas as a means of increasing supply. Developing a comprehensive capital plan across long-term care and assisted living was also supported by the Hospital Employees' Union and the BC Health Coalition.

The Committee also heard from the BC Care Providers Association & EngAge BC with respect to funding for COVID-19 related costs, such as personal protective equipment. They explained that pandemic-related costs are significant, and that some care homes faced financial challenges prior to the pandemic; as such, they were of the view that all COVID-19-related costs should be fully funded. They also requested funding to address social isolation through innovations and modifications to physical space, technologies and the use of recreational therapy. They emphasized that social isolation contributes to chronic illnesses, depression, cognitive decline and dementia, and that this is an ongoing challenge that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The BC Government and Service Employees' Union, along with the BC Health Coalition, was critical of for-profit operators, and supported sustained public investments in expanding and enhancing services and building new public facilities. The BC Health Coalition additionally recommended improving accountability and transparency in long-term care; this was also supported by the Hospital Employees' Union who pointed to a report by the Seniors Advocate which found gaps in the provision of funded care hours by for-profit operators.

The Seniors Advocate focused her presentation on home support, describing how the regulated co-payment acts as a financial impediment to staying in the community and leads seniors to shift to long-term care. She recommended revising the co-payment for the home support program, noting the importance of having community supports available for seniors and their families to enable seniors to stay at home as long as possible. She emphasized that investing in home support costs the public system less compared to public funding for a long-term care space. Lowering the cost of home support, as well as expanding the types of services offered, was also a priority for the Society for the Protection and Care of Seniors. The BC Care Providers Association & EngAge BC recommended creating a new provincial tax credit of \$2,500 for seniors receiving home health care and independent living to help subsidize the cost of home support services.

Committee Members also heard from Canuck Place Children's Hospice, a pediatric palliative care provider for children with life-threatening illnesses. The hospice explained that they are funded through a combination of fixed support through the Provincial Health Services Authority (40 percent) and community donations (60 percent). They noted that since 2017, demand for their consultation services has increased 48 percent; however, their annual funding support remains unchanged. They requested funding support for ongoing operational needs and capital upgrades, particularly with respect to technology and infrastructure, to meet the unique needs of patients across the province.

Dental Care

The BC Dental Association discussed several issues related to dental coverage for low-income seniors and individuals on social assistance. They noted that seniors often lose their benefits when they retire and many do not have the ability to cover dental costs, leading to them forgoing care and developing oral health issues. To address this, the Association recommended creating a dental care plan for low-income seniors who receive rent subsidies under the Shelter Aid For Elderly Renters program. With respect to dental coverage for individuals on social assistance, they explained that the last fee increase was 13 years ago and that the funding limits no longer meet need. They stated that current provisions end up delaying necessary treatment, and adversely affect patient health and lead to increased costs in the long run, and recommended updating fees.

The Association also described issues with respect to the provision of dental care in long-term care. They stated that provincial regulations require patients entering a care home to have an oral health plan, receive daily oral hygiene, and have access to an oral health provider once a year; however, implementation is inconsistent and dentists are frustrated with a lack of support in providing oral care in these facilities. The Association recommended providing dental coverage for long-term care residents and creating a dental coordinator position in long-term care facilities to assist care aides in providing dental hygiene and to support dental professionals with organizing patients for treatment. Similarly, the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC recommended making dental care, as well as hearing aids, available free of cost to seniors in long-term care.

Another area of interest to the BC Dental Association was providing access to PharmaNet for dentists. They pointed out that dentists prescribe medications and that access to a patient's medication history is vital for appropriate care.

Digital Health

Investments in virtual health, including telehealth, were supported by a number of organizations and individuals; however, they also reinforced the need for investments in connectivity for rural and remote communities. Several submissions described how the pandemic has accelerated digital transformation and drawn attention to opportunities for sustaining, exploring and adopting digital health solutions.

TELUS noted that digital technology has been shown to be beneficial during the pandemic by relieving the burden on traditional health infrastructure and enabling patients to stay at home. They pointed to their investments in digital health applications and an open health platform, including virtual care applications, as examples, and how these reduce hospital visits and enable access to primary care. TELUS recommended the province continue investing in digital solutions through pilots and partnerships with other levels of government, civil society, and the private sector.

Health Human Resources

The Committee heard from some organizations about the need to address shortages of health care professionals across the system to reduce wait times and improve access to services and surgeries. The Health Sciences Association of BC and the Professional Employees Association attributed the shortages to the compensation structure, and workload and burnout. Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia also discussed challenges with workload, including high caseloads and increasing patient complexity,

in advocating for increasing funding for adequate staffing in community health practitioners such as occupational therapists and physical therapists.

The Canadian Association of Physician Assistants appeared before the Committee to recommend incorporating physician assistants in BC's health care system. They explained that physician assistants have a broad scope of practice, including emergency services, women's health, mental health, and chronic disease management. They stated that BC lags other provinces and countries with respect to integrating physician assistants in the health care system, noting that there are already physician assistants in BC who work under federal jurisdiction in the Canadian Armed Forces and are embedded at Vancouver General Hospital where they train to maintain clinical readiness ahead of deployment.

The Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science discussed specific challenges related to the supply of medical laboratory technologists. They stated that half of all medical laboratory technologists will be eligible to retire in the next 10 years and the supply of new graduates is insufficient to offset these numbers, with challenges particularly acute in rural and remote areas. They recommended addressing this issue by increasing capacity in training programs, creating sustainable bridging programs for internationally educated technologists, and incenting technologists to relocate to rural and remote areas.

Committee Members also received a request from Speech and Hearing BC to increase the number of speech-language pathologists per capita. According to the organization, BC has the third-lowest number of practicing speech-language pathologists per capita of all provinces. Increasing the number would improve access to services related to evaluating and treating communication and swallowing disorders that are often related to progressive neurological disorders.

Medical Services Plan

The Committee received some recommendations for expanding public coverage of health services to include universal dental, para-medical and mental health services. The BC Federation of Labour explained that public services are especially critical at a time of crisis and that the pandemic has revealed gaps that leave out vulnerable people. They were of the view that province should increase investments in public services to ensure all British Columbians have access to important resources. First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition similarly highlighted the need to prioritize funding for supports and services for families, particularly those who face systemic barriers to access, and recommended removing the waiting period for medical coverage for newcomers.

The British Columbia Chiropractic Association discussed specific issues related to the Medical Services Plan rate for supplementary benefits for low-income British Columbians. They stated that the current rate does not cover costs and patients are unable to pay the portion of the fee that is not covered, and recommended the number of supplementary benefit visits per year and contribution rate be increased in alignment with the fees paid by ICBC and WorkSafeBC, which are higher.

Mental Health and Addiction

COVID-19 and Mental Health

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division, fifty percent of Canadians reported a worsening of their mental health with levels of anxiety and depression increasing and one-third reported increased alcohol and cannabis consumption with the onset of the pandemic. The Association also expressed concerns about deaths of despair – deaths by suicide, alcohol, opioids and other substances. They referenced studies which show a correlated increase in suicide related deaths with increases in unemployment.

Several submissions also stressed how individuals with mental illness and addiction, including those who are institutionalized or precariously housed, have been disproportionately impacted by, and are vulnerable to, the pandemic.

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition emphasized the impact of the pandemic on the mental and emotional health of children and families. They noted that there are diminishing opportunities for co-regulation of emotion and stress through social connection and support of families, culture and community due to social isolation measures, and that parents and caregivers are under added financial strain and stress which has an impact on children and their wellbeing.

A number of organizations supported increased investments in mental health and addiction services and supports. The Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division recommended building on the COVID-19 related health and social supports to shift the province to a wider range of universal services that are equity-oriented and support British Columbians in attaining their best possible mental health. Phoenix Society drew attention to the importance of an integrated approach that incorporates wrap-around support services in recognition of the connection between mental health and addiction and homelessness. Several organizations, including the First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition and the BC Schizophrenia Society, referenced the need for mental health services and supports for children and families, while Inclusion BC recommended creating an inclusive mental health strategy for mental health supports for people with developmental disabilities.

Additional funding for residential treatment was another common theme. Residential treatment provides much-needed care and support to individuals experiencing addiction and corresponding mental health challenges. The Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce noted the link between mental health, drug and alcohol addiction, and the criminal justice system, and recommended funding for local and accessible residential treatment, reimbursements for individuals seeking privately-operated treatment, and support for individuals who are incarcerated pre- and post-release.

The Committee also heard about the need for residential treatment spaces in specific regions and for specific populations. The Bridge Youth and Family Services highlighted a lack of live-in treatment options for young people and the limited number of adult withdrawal management spaces in the Okanagan. They stated that demand has remained constant and they continue to provide service in excess of funded occupancy. They recommended investing in the Okanagan's system of recovery and addictions care by directly funding a local

youth treatment resource and additional adult withdrawal management beds. Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia recommended creating more stand-alone addiction treatment facilities for self-identified women and non-binary persons who fear stigma and are not always well-supported by health care providers and institutions.

Realistic Success Recovery Society and VisionQuest Recovery Society recommended per diem rates for supportive recovery facilities be increased, stating that these facilities are underfunded. VisionQuest Recovery Society noted that their organization focuses on rehabilitation of individuals whose substance use has resulted in them becoming involved in the criminal justice system and that supportive recovery facilities are cheaper than provincial jail. They also indicated that not all operators provide the same level or type of services and so the per-diem should be restructured to provide for a base rate and additional amounts based on services offered. Realistic Success Recovery Society further recommended that the comfort allowance be increased as this rate has not changed since 2009.

Métis Nation British Columbia requested funding to improve mental health and wellness outcomes for Métis people in BC. They described their work with the Ministries of Mental Health and Addictions, and Health in exploring long-term partnerships that recognizes the unique priorities, interests and perspectives of Métis people. Some of their key priorities include: building capacity to advance Métis-led initiatives related to cultural safety, harm reduction, and an anti-stigma campaign, and gathering and reporting on Métis-specific health data.

A number of submissions highlighted the ongoing opioid epidemic and the differences in response between the two public health emergencies, describing how the overdose crisis has been exacerbated by COVID-19 due to the need for self-isolation and limited access to a safe supply of drugs. Decriminalizing drug use and providing safe supply permanently were common recommendations in these submissions.

Pharmacare

Several submissions touched on the need to improve access and affordability of prescription medication, with some organizations, such as the BC Federation of Labour and the Society for the Protection and Care of Seniors, recommending implementation of a national pharmacare program. Innovative Medicines Canada also supported universal coverage and suggested an approach similar to the Fair Pharmacare program that offers a mix of private and public plans while emphasizing the importance of ensuring any program or agreements provide British Columbians with timely and fair access to a broad range of medicines. The Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association discussed opportunities to improve access to affordable medication through existing workplace and individual drug plans. They further suggested working with the sector to bring down costs through bulk-buying and enhanced access to high cost medicines.

Innovative Medicines Canada also referenced recent amendments to federal regulations and policies that, in their view, limits access to innovative medicines and discourages research and investment in Canada. Federal regulations were of interest to Merck Canada Inc. as well; they stated that the new regulations add business uncertainty. Both companies encouraged the province to work with the federal government and the pharmaceutical industry on these issues.

The Prosthetics and Orthotics Association of BC told the Committee that the cost of prosthetic and orthotic care has gone up significantly without a corresponding increase in funding assistance, resulting in many individuals wearing devices that are less than ideal, postponing repairs, or going without any device

altogether. They also stated that BC is the only province that does not provide funding for orthotic devices for adults. As such, they recommended increasing funding for prosthetic and orthotic devices, including ensuring adults in BC have funding through their lifetime.

Speech and Hearing BC recommended funding for hearing aids and assisted listening devices. They noted that more than 10 percent of British Columbians experience some form of hearing loss with the prevalence of hearing loss increasing for those aged 65 and over; however, less than one-quarter seek help, largely due to prohibitive cost barriers.

The Committee also received recommendations to remove the PST on medical cannabis from several organizations, including Consumer Choice Center, Medical Cannabis Canada, and Aurora Cannabis Inc. They described the application of the PST as a barrier for most British Columbians who use medical cannabis, noting that many pay out-of-pocket as Pharmacare and many private insurers do not cover medical cannabis. The Arthritis Society, BC and Yukon Division shared that many individuals with arthritis use medical cannabis for pain management and that the cost barriers could lead individuals to the illicit market.

Primary Care

The Committee heard continued support for team-based primary care models, including community health centres, and how these models provide quality, integrated care and is cost effective in addressing the complex needs of British Columbians. Several organizations, including the BC Association of Community Health Centres and the BC Health Coalition, discussed opportunities to make improvements to these models, particularly with respect to the funding model for community health centres, one model of team-based primary care provides a broad range of integrated health and social services. They described challenges with the fee-for-service model and the need to better address overhead costs separately from clinicians, as well as the need to incorporate health promotion and the social determinants of health.

The Community Alliance of Racialized Ethnocultural Services for Equitable Health highlighted how community health centres can meet the diverse needs of ethnocultural and marginalized communities; however, they noted continued barriers to access related to language and understanding and navigating the system. They therefore recommended integrating organizations that provide settlement and social support services, including positions such as cultural health brokers, into primary care.

The BC Rural Health Network was supportive of the community health centre model for the provision of primary care in rural and remote communities. They recommended the province increase funding for current and new community health centres, including establishing a partnership table with community representation to guide development, policy and processes.

Three organizations recommended better integration of different professions into primary care. The Nurse and Nurse Practitioners of British Columbia recommended the scope and role of registered nurses be expanded to complement and enhance primary care networks as registered nurses already play a critical role in the accessibility and sustainability of health services in northern, rural and remote communities and that registered nurses often work beyond their scope of practice to provide urgent care. The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, BC Chapter advocated for shifting funding from a general allocation for allied health professionals to individual allocations for specific disciplines to ensure different professions are included on teams. The British Columbia Chiropractic Association recommended specifically including chiropractors on primary care teams as 30 percent of primary care visits are for musculoskeletal-related reasons.

The British Columbia Chiropractic Association also recommended funding a large-scale low-back-pain initiative to reduce pressure for family physician appointments and improve the management of musculoskeletal conditions. They additionally encouraged allowing chiropractors to directly refer for publicly funded x-ray tests and access the picture archiving and communication system, noting that this would help reduce the number of unnecessary family physician visits.

Public Health

The Committee heard about several areas related to public health, including reproductive health. AccessBC Campaign for Free Prescription Contraception recommended providing free prescription contraception for all people in BC. They shared that access to contraception is a key aspect of medical care that allows people to manage their own health and control reproductive decisions; however, cost is a barrier and this cost falls disproportionately on women and people with uteruses. They noted that investments in contraception coverage generates savings with respect to other direct health care costs resulting from unintended pregnancies, as well as downstream costs for social services.

Aisle proposed a pilot program to increase the adoption of reusable menstrual care products to address issues related to access to menstrual supplies and environmental issues. They identified lack of access to menstrual supplies as a barrier to full participation in employment and education and noted that at least 20 billion pads and tampons, plus packaging, end up in landfills and sewer systems in North America on an annual basis.

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition recommended increased investments in maternal health and infant development, including culturally safe support programs. They described inequities in the provision of prenatal and postnatal supports, particularly as a result of the pandemic, and shared concerns that increased parental stress from the pandemic will have a negative impact on parent-child attachment.

Another theme was increasing investments in physical activity and wellness. One individual described how the health system is focused on disease-treatment and has insufficient resources for promoting maintenance of good health. The BC Alliance for Healthy Living noted that chronic disease affects one in three British Columbians with much of it preventable. They encouraged funding for the provincial physical activity and active transportation strategies.

The Committee also received a range of recommendations related to vaping, alcohol, and sugary drinks. The BC Lung Association encouraged continued resourcing for the provincial plan to protect youth from the health risk of vaping as well as funding for the Association's vaping prevention toolkit, noting that smoking rates have increased since 2017. The BC Alliance for Health Living advocated for shifts in alcohol taxes and extending the PST to all sugar-sweetened beverages, including non-carbonated beverages as means to reduce unhealthy behaviours while raising funds for health promotion. Conversely, 7-Eleven Canada and the Canadian Beverage Association questioned the efficacy of the tax on sugar-sweetened beverages and recommended the application of the PST on these beverages be reconsidered.

Métis Nation British Columbia stated that the health needs of Métis people are not adequately met and considered in the health care system. They described how their organization advocates on behalf of Métis people for health programs and services that acknowledge and support Métis people's distinct culture, identity, health needs, and health outcomes, and shared a number of initiatives currently underway, including the development of a health and wellness plan as well as better integration of Indigenous primary health care services and increasing Métis representation in the health care system.

Research

The importance of provincial funding for health research was highlighted by a few organizations. The Vancouver Prostate Centre stated that this funding is key to keeping BC's health and biosciences industry thriving and that funding is currently strained due to the pandemic. The Praxis Spinal Cord Institute highlighted their work on spinal cord research and treatment, including recent shifts to development spinal-cord injury specific COVID-19 resources, and how funding is important to supporting their administrative structure, in recommending continued investment in health research organizations.

In requesting ongoing funding for their organization, Genome BC described their work supporting genomics research and innovation projects and highlighted how they pivoted during the pandemic to support research and information gathering to inform public policy and mitigation strategies. They explained that provincial funding enables them to leverage additional resources from industry, federal programs, and international organizations.

LifeSciences BC made several recommendations for supporting the life sciences sector. They shared how the life sciences community contributed to the COVID-19 response by redeploying inventory, advising on personal protective equipment and medical supplies, and facilitating knowledge sharing. They were of the view that the province can leverage this work to grow the sector and accelerate BC's economic recovery.

Rural and Remote Health Care

Committee Members continued to hear about challenges with access to services and professionals for British Columbians in rural and remote communities. The BC Rural Health Network suggested the province create rural health councils, as recommended by the Centre for Rural Health Research, to collaboratively engage with rural communities on health care planning and decision-making. They also offered transportation-related solutions for improving access, including developing a province-wide system of patient transportation for travel to specialist appointments and reimbursing for out-of-pocket costs, as well as implementing a rural travelling specialist program to bring specialists to rural communities.

Transportation solutions were also a focus for the Nurses and Nurse Practitioners of British Columbia. They recommended expanding and providing accessible, affordable transportation options to address the cost of travelling long distances to access treatment in an urban centre which can be prohibitive for British Columbians in rural and remote communities. They also advocated for a general expansion of health care services in rural and remote communities to meet the needs of individual communities and improve health outcomes, explaining that many communities are under-resourced

Surgical Capacity and Wait Times

The BC Anesthesiologists Society discussed opportunities to improve surgical capacity and reduce surgical wait lists. In addition to reviewing recent investments to identify and implement best practices, they recommended hiring more anesthesia physician assistants to improve operating room efficiency.

The Health Sciences Association of BC and the BC Health Coalition noted the need to address the surgical backlog resulting from the pandemic, as well as success with BC's surgical and diagnostic wait time strategy. They recommended investment in identified public system improvements, including staffing and capacity, scheduling of surgeries and recovery, central intake and waitlist management, and operating room efficiencies.

Conclusions

Committee Members identified the charitable and non-profit sector as another area requiring urgent funding to address significant financial challenges brought on by the pandemic. They noted that the sector provides vital, and in many cases, essential services within the broader health and social care system. Along with funding, and as with arts and culture organizations, the Committee was of the view that incentives to donate could be an additional avenue by which to generate revenue.

The impact of the pandemic on BC's community care sector and seniors was acutely top-of-mind for Committee Members. They discussed how the pandemic brought attention to deficiencies with respect to staffing and care standards and the opportunity to build on the work undertaken during the pandemic to sustain investments in long-term care and assisted living and make permanent improvements. The Committee also recognized ongoing challenges for the sector relating to the recruitment and retention of qualified staff and further supported increased investments in home support to enable seniors to live independently and age in place.

Committee Members supported investments in digital health, noting the value it provides in terms of efficiency and freeing up capacity in the system, as well as how it facilitates access to care for British Columbians in rural, remote and Indigenous communities. They also observed broader support for digital health solutions and how well it can work as more British Columbians experienced receiving care through digital means due to the pandemic. The Committee again noted that investments in digital infrastructure and connectivity are broadly required in order to support continued innovations with digital health (see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion).

Investments in a full continuum of programs and services for mental health and addiction services continued to be a focus for the Committee. Members recognized that BC is still in the midst of another public health crisis related to the opioid epidemic, and acknowledged investments to address ongoing challenges related to fragmentation in the mental health and addiction system and the need to continue those investments as well as make targeted investments in residential treatment.

The Committee expressed support for team-based primary care models, noting how they have been well-received by many communities and how different professionals, such as chiropractors, registered nurses and occupational therapists, are interested in being a regular part of these teams. Members noted opportunities to ensure the services and supports are better integrated to build relationships with, and facilitate access for, vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Another area of interest to Committee Members was the provision of dental care. They recognized the health impacts of insufficient coverage, particularly for those in need, and recommended the creation of a coverage plan for low-income seniors and those in long-term care. The Committee also recommended exploring the potential of providing dentists access to PharmaNet given that dentists prescribe medication.

As it relates to pharmacare, the Committee recommended continuing to engage federal and territorial partners on a national pharmacare program. Committee Members also identified opportunities to address inequities and affordability within the current system as it relates to funding for medical equipment and technology. They additionally suggested examining the tax treatment for cannabis to distinguish its use for medical versus recreational purposes.

With respect to public health initiatives, Committee Members made several recommendations aimed at addressing barriers and inequities. These included providing free prescription contraception, exploring the provision of reusable menstrual products to students in need, and improving access to maternal health with special attention to low-income families and marginalized communities. The Committee also supported aligning recovery with investments in physical activity, including investments in active transportation (see also: Recommendation 121 in Transportation and Transit).

Committee Members noted significant challenges with both bringing specialists services to smaller communities and transportation services to take British Columbians to their appointments. They recommended increasing both services and ensuring better coordination and alignment so the two systems work together. Opportunities to improve decision-making for the provision of services in rural and remote communities was also of interest; the Committee recommended establishing rural health councils to act as advisory bodies in this regard.

Committee Members were impressed and greatly appreciated how researchers adapted and pivoted during the pandemic. They agreed on the need for general increases in investments in research, including for organizations such as Genome BC, and recognized the need to support business development as well.

Other recommendations related to providing appropriate supports and services to British Columbians living with chronic and complex diseases, opportunities to expand training capacity and resources for health care professionals, and building on recent innovations to increase surgical capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Charitable/Non-Profit Sector

65. Provide urgent and stable funding to the charitable and non-profit sector so that they can continue to provide services to British Columbians, including exploring the provision of incentives to donate such as a donation-matching program, and increasing the charitable donation tax credit. [see also: Social Services, Community Social Services and Social Policy]

Chronic and Complex Diseases

66. Provide appropriate supports and services for British Columbians living with chronic and complex diseases, such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, arthritis, brain injury, cancer, diabetes, epilepsy, inflammatory bowel disease, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, and brain injury, including increasing investments in the Chronic Complex Diseases program.

Community Care and Seniors

67. Sustain investments and continue to address gaps related to staffing and care standards in long-term care, including training, recruitment and retention of qualified staff.

68. Increase investments in home support, including revising the regulated co-payment for the home support program to enable seniors to stay at home.

Dental Care

69. Explore creating a dental plan for low-income seniors who receive rent subsidies under the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters program, as well as providing dental coverage for low-income seniors in long-term care facilities.
70. Explore providing dentists with access to PharmaNet.

Digital Health

71. In recognition of the increased use and need of digital health during the pandemic, expand and accelerate investments in digital health infrastructure, such as telehealth, to improve and increase access to care for all British Columbians, with attention to needed investments in digital connectivity in rural, remote and Indigenous communities. [see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion]

Health Human Resources

72. Provide targeted, increased funding for training health care professionals in areas facing shortages with a focus on expanding capacity and resources within existing programs in smaller communities and ensuring opportunities for British Columbians in rural, remote and Indigenous communities to train locally.

Mental Health and Addiction

73. Continue investments in a cohesive continuum of services for mental health and addiction from prevention to intervention to recovery, including the provision of culturally safe supports and services, family supports, and services specific to children and youth.
74. Increase residential treatment capacity, including ensuring facilities provide appropriate, relevant care to meet the needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Pharmacare

75. Continue to explore with the federal, provincial and territorial governments the establishment of a universal pharmacare plan.
76. Review and address inequities with funding and benefits for medical equipment and technology, such as prosthetic and orthotic care and hearing aids and assisted listening devices.
77. Examine mechanisms in the taxation system to remove or rebate the PST for medical cannabis.

Primary Care

78. Expand the delivery of primary health care through team-based, multi-disciplinary models, such as community health centres, and ensure services and supports are integrated within these models to build relationships and facilitate access to care for marginalized communities.

Public Health

79. Provide free prescription contraception for all people in British Columbia.
80. Provide funding to pilot and assess the impact of providing reusable menstrual products to BC students in need.
81. Improve access to maternal health care across the province, with special attention to low-income families and other marginalized communities, including investing in accessible, culturally safe parent support programs for all types of families.
82. Align economic recovery investments with BC's Physical Activity strategy to promote physical activity. [see also: Recommendation 121 in Transportation & Transit]

Research

83. Invest in health science research, including providing ongoing funding to Genome B.C., and support innovative, small and medium enterprises with business development to thrive in the commercial market.

Rural and Remote Health Care

84. In consultation with rural communities, establish and fund rural health councils to act as advisory bodies to engage with rural British Columbians and inform decision-making on the provision of health care services to meet the unique needs of rural communities.
85. Improve access to health care services in rural, remote and coastal communities by increasing the provision of specialist services and transportation services, and better coordinating and aligning these services.

Surgical Capacity and Wait Times

86. Build on recent innovations, investments and best practices with streamlining and improving efficiency to increase surgical capacity and address wait times.

Housing

COVID-19

Several organizations stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened existing social and economic inequalities as well as amplified challenges related to housing. They emphasized how the crisis has highlighted the importance of a safe home, and described how marginalized and vulnerable populations have been disproportionately impacted, and how issues such as homelessness have been exacerbated. Many individuals and organizations also made references to residential tenancy measures that have been implemented during the pandemic and their impact on both tenants and landlords.

The Fraser Valley Real Estate Board noted that the real estate market is starting to recover as realtors and their clients become more comfortable with physical distancing and public safety protocols; however, the Canadian Home Builders Association of BC shared that 46 percent of respondents to a member survey had laid off between one and four employees. Others noted that the pandemic has caused significant disruption for home buyers who have been largely left out of federal and provincial relief measures.

Survey Highlights

- Question 1: Housing was the 3rd most common topic.
 - Question 2: Investing in affordable housing and working to stabilize the real estate market received the third most selections.
 - Question 3: Homelessness and poverty reduction received 11.3 cents; Affordable housing received 11 cents.
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Affordable and Social Housing

Housing affordability was a significant concern for several organizations and individuals. The Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness shared that a housing needs assessment in the Comox Valley found that the housing crisis is getting worse with approximately 44 percent of renters experiencing major affordability challenges. Similarly, the YWCA Metro Vancouver shared that according to a 2019 report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, not one of Metro Vancouver's neighbourhoods supports a minimum wage earner, the majority of whom are women, to rent a one-bedroom apartment. Noting the loss of older, more affordable rental homes over the last generation, the BC Non-Profit Housing Association and the Co-operative Housing Federation of BC emphasized the need for a provincial rental housing acquisition strategy to help non-profit and co-operative housing entities acquire rental housing stock as it comes up for sale.

The Committee heard several calls for support and increased funding for affordable housing both generally and for specific populations, including those escaping intimate-partner violence, women, children and families, people with disabilities, low-income seniors, and youth. These submissions highlighted that vulnerable and marginalized populations have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and noted the need for wrap-around supports to be integrated within housing. The Comox Valley Transition Society spoke to the need for gender-specific supportive housing with staff trained and experienced in supporting the specific needs of women, many of whom report feeling unsafe, being victimized or traumatized in mixed-gender housing. Both the Northern Confluence Initiative and the BC Government and Service Employees' Union spoke about the importance of the Indigenous Housing Fund, noting the need for more investment in this area due to the scale of unmet housing requirements faced by Indigenous peoples in BC.

Some organizations also referred to the need for specific affordable housing projects; for example, the Surrey Board of Trade framed social housing as a way to decrease social and crime related costs in the region. Similarly, the First United Church Community Ministry Society sought support for a project to redevelop a building to provide affordable rental housing on East Hastings St. in Vancouver. Métis Nation British Columbia explained that unlike First Nations, the Métis Nation is not land-based and therefore they require housing services in all areas of the province. They requested support to assist with the development of affordable rental and social housing projects in key areas. A few individuals also referred to community land trusts; Michael Markwick noted that the District of West Vancouver could use land it has purchased from Vancouver Coastal Health to provide non-market housing to families.

Development

With regard to development, some organizations recommended streamlining processes, particularly at the local government level, to increase housing supply. The Victoria Real Estate Board stated that many projects are put on hold due to time consuming processes at the local level while the Canadian Home Builders Association of British Columbia noted that thousands of new homes are shovel-ready but awaiting the necessary permits. The British Columbia Real Estate Association and LandlordBC acknowledged that some local governments have taken steps to speed up approval of development applications and called for further support in this area. The Canadian Home Builders Association of British Columbia also noted that upfront funding for future projects is a challenge for residential home builders as it can take over two years for a development to be approved and by this time, the original estimates do not reflect the costs. Similarly, the Victoria Residential Builder Association referred to examples of developers facing significant increases to project cost estimates contrary to guidelines from BC's Best Practices Guide for Development Cost Charges.

The Committee also heard about several ways to increase housing supply including by supporting increased residential development near transit, schools, employment and recreational opportunities; providing incentives to developers; and reducing PST on construction materials for residential projects. For example, the Fraser Valley Real Estate Board noted that commuting patterns and working arrangements have evolved due to the COVID-19 pandemic and advocated for providing incentives to build different types of homes including alternatives to single family homes and houses to accommodate residents working from home.

Regarding building modernization and building codes, the Urban Development Institute Pacific Region highlighted mass timber construction and green building technology as opportunities for reducing carbon emissions while supporting business and job opportunities. To that end, they recommended increasing awareness of energy efficiency expectations for new and existing buildings and expanding funding to support

green building construction. With respect to the BC Energy Step Code, they expressed concern about their members' ability to meet the higher steps without incentives.

Homelessness

Many individuals and organizations emphasized the need for housing and supports for people experiencing homelessness, particularly given the importance of isolating at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Wachiay Friendship Centre explained that over 7,000 individuals in BC experience homelessness and cited research that suggests actual rates are much greater than point-in-time counts with many women, youth, and Indigenous peoples amongst the hidden homeless. The BC Society of Transition Houses explained that intimate-partner violence is the primary cause of women's homelessness with rates of violence increasing due to the COVID-19 pandemic; views to ShelterSafe Canada, a map of all women's shelters in Canada, doubled in March 2020 when compared to March 2019 and tripled in April of 2020 when compared to 2019. The BC Society of Transition Houses along with the Comox Valley Transition Society advocated for increased support for the homelessness prevention program which provides women fleeing violence access to safe affordable housing. The Comox Valley Transition Society shared that they have been able to support 17 women with \$4,500 from this program each month; however, they expressed concerns about vacancy rates and time restraints. The program helps to fill the gaps and meet the needs of women searching for housing in BC and the BC Society of Transition Houses recommended expanding the program to more communities.

Tamitik Status of Women requested funding to support their transition housing, rental assistance, and homelessness prevention programs, as well as staffing. They stated that there has been an increase in demand for their services, and that the provision of housing programs in particular has become more challenging and expensive due to the industrial boom in their region.

In advocating for a provincial plan to end youth homelessness, A Way Home Kamloops Society and BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness spoke about the unique experiences and needs of young people with lived experiences of homelessness. Covenant House Vancouver also focused on youth homelessness in their written submission, noting a disparity between the number of homeless youth and available youth-specific housing units. Covenant House Vancouver shared that there needs to be youth-specific housing facilities in order to meet the unique needs of youth – such as the need for life skills training, intensive case management, and mental health and drug misuse services. They, along with A Way Home Kamloops Society and BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness, recommended investment in youth specific housing, along with investments in services and supports that are specific to youth, rather than spreading youth housing among complexes for the general population.

Money Laundering

The British Columbia Real Estate Association explained that emergency measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic have placed many people under increased financial pressure which can make them targets for mortgage fraud. To address this issue, they support the development of smart anti-money laundering initiatives including public education campaigns and coordinating with the federal government to create a comprehensive, efficient enforcement and regulatory regime to reduce money laundering.

Real Estate

Both the British Columbia Real Estate Association and LandlordBC made references to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) underwriting policies, explaining that the latest borrowing restrictions will negatively impact first-time home buyers who will have to wait longer to save money for a down payment to comply with the new requirements. The Canadian Home Builders' Association of British Columbia also expressed concern that the new CMHC measures will restrict investment in existing purpose-built rental buildings.

Mortgage Professionals Canada and other organizations framed housing as an important part of the economic recovery in BC and advocated for support for home buyers. Referencing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on home buyers who have been left out of federal and provincial relief measures, the Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver advocated for incentives for first time home buyers to stimulate home buying and help the economy recover. The Canadian Home Builders' Association of British Columbia also recommended incentives with a focus on the Better Homes BC program which allows homeowners to access funding for residential projects including renovations.

Two organizations spoke to the issue of real estate data availability and access. The Appraisal Institute of Canada – British Columbia highlighted the importance of accurate market data and noted that data availability has become limited and costly with many data providers placing restrictions on access. They called for reduced costs and barriers for appraisers to Land Title and Survey Authority and BC Assessment data. Mortgage Professionals Canada expressed concerns about potential reductions in privacy protections related to the implementation of the new beneficial ownership registry, noting that the registry may be constructed to permit individuals to search a real estate ownership database by name, providing a sense of the approximate net worth of real estate owners.

Rental Housing Regulations

Multiple individuals called for rent control to help provide stable housing for all British Columbians. Dianne Varga referred to data which showed that 43 percent of BC renters spend over 30 percent of their income on shelter costs and linked unreasonable rent increases to a lack of vacancy control as landlords are permitted to raise rents as much as they like when rental units become vacant. Both Varga and the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition advocated for vacancy control in order to protect renters.

A few organizations emphasized the need for supports for residential and commercial landlords who have accrued rent deficits as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations including the Fraser Valley Real Estate Board, LandlordBC, and the British Columbia Real Estate Association noted the impact of temporary residential tenancy restrictions implemented during the pandemic on landlords, many of whom have not been able to collect their monthly rent.

Strata

Several organizations referred to the significant challenges that strata corporations have been facing in renewing their strata insurance since the fall of 2019, noting that this has led to significant increases in strata fees and fear on the part of buyers to invest in strata properties. According to the Insurance Bureau of Canada, most strata corporations in BC are experiencing premium price increases of approximately 35 percent.

Real estate boards and associations suggested various amendments to the *Strata Property Act* to improve the affordability of strata insurance over the long-term, while also providing short-term relief for consumers. For example, the Insurance Bureau of Canada explained that including a definition of what a standard residential strata lot is in the Act will clearly determine what strata lot owners are responsible for and what the corporation is responsible for and that this may help reduce the number of claims made by strata corporations. The Fraser Valley Real Estate Board made suggestions to amend the Act to give strata owners and tenants advance notice about changes in insurance coverage, allowing them sufficient time to adjust their own insurance to cover shortfalls or increased costs. These organizations also noted the importance of providing mandatory training and best practices for strata councils. The British Columbia Real Estate Association, the Victoria Real Estate Board and other organizations further emphasized the need to include proof of insurance on the form B information certificate, which provides information about a strata unit and a strata corporation, and is typically requested when someone is interested in buying a strata unit to help buyers make informed decisions.

Taxation

Multiple organizations, including the Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver, stated that the current property transfer tax exemption threshold for first-time home buyers of \$500,000 does not reflect the reality of home prices in many parts of BC, and recommended increasing this threshold. The Committee also received submissions related to the additional school tax; LandlordBC and other organizations stated that taxing vacant lands held for rental development increases the cost of development, rather than encouraging rental housing supply, and called for properties in the development process to be exempt from this tax.

Input on the speculation and vacancy tax was varied, with some calling for increases to the tax and others for its elimination. The British Columbia Real Estate Association shared results of an economic analysis which showed that the tax is ineffective outside of Metro Vancouver. They acknowledged that while the speculation and vacancy tax may have contributed to reduced home sales and an increase in rental supply, it is difficult to disentangle this from impacts of the mortgage stress test and other policies like the City of Vancouver's empty homes tax.

Regarding the property tax and assessments, the Surrey Board of Trade and other organizations suggested reviewing BC Assessments' practices of assessing properties based on highest value rather than actual use, especially since residential landlords cannot pass property tax increases directly on to their tenants. Both LandlordBC and the British Columbia Real Estate Association made references to recommendations made by the Union of BC Municipalities to expand the Property Tax Deferral Program to all residential taxpayers. They suggested that this also include purpose-built rental housing and residential development lands in order to help property owners and builders manage their expenses.

Two organizations also suggested tax credits for home renovations. The Canadian Home Builders' Association of British Columbia explained that many renovation contracts were canceled or postponed due to stay-at-home orders. The Victoria Residential Builders Association advocated for tax credits in order to help improve seismic safety and create much-needed skilled jobs.

Conclusions

Committee Members acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a long-term impact on individuals and families with respect to housing, especially for those who were already living in precarious situations. Noting that housing and homelessness exists as a continuum, they were supportive of measures to accelerate investments in affordable and supportive housing. They further emphasized the importance of taking a housing first approach and providing wrap-around services and supports.

Committee Members particularly highlighted the importance of housing that considers the specific needs of different populations. This includes youth-specific housing with supports to aid youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness and exploitation to enable them to meet their basic and critical care needs and increase their potential to become productive members of their communities as adults. The Committee also emphasized the need to expand investment in Indigenous housing that is culturally safe and designed with input from Indigenous communities and discussed ways to work on this with the federal government. Committee Members acknowledged the increasing rates of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need for ongoing efforts to support British Columbians experiencing violence so they do not have to choose between living in a violent home and becoming homeless. Requests for specific affordable housing projects were also acknowledged with the Committee highlighting the value of working with community partners and non-profit organizations to address housing need.

Regarding money laundering, Committee Members acknowledged ongoing work being done on this issue and noted that people are facing increased financial pressures due to the COVID-19 pandemic which can make them targets for mortgage fraud. Members also reflected on the impact of the pandemic on the real estate market and acknowledged concerns about federal underwriting policies and their impact on home buyers. The Committee also appreciated proposals to address rent prices and to support renters' rights in light of the pandemic.

Committee Members discussed issues related to strata corporations, taxation, and the development approval processes. Regarding taxation, Members noted concerns that exemption thresholds for the property transfer tax do not reflect current housing prices and recommended reviewing these thresholds on an annual basis. The Committee also recognized delays with respect to development approval processes at the local level and discussed ways in which to work with local governments to address this issue and accelerate housing supply.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Affordable and Social Housing

87. Accelerate the building of a continuum of supportive and affordable housing across the province, including transitional housing for women facing violence, gender-specific supportive housing, and expanded housing options for people with disabilities, youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and low-income seniors.
88. Work with the federal government to expand investment in Indigenous housing.

Development

89. Explore ways to support local governments to approve new housing construction projects and accelerate housing supply by streamlining development processes and implementing the recommendations from the BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's 2019 Development Approvals Process Review.

Taxation

90. Review the property transfer tax thresholds and make any necessary adjustments to address the challenges related to home ownership due to the dynamic nature of the real estate market.

K-12 Education

COVID-19

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on K-12 education was a common theme across submissions from school districts, organizations, and individuals. In particular, the transition to remote learning highlighted inequities with regard to access to technology and internet connectivity. Many submissions also noted the mental health impacts of the pandemic on students, families, and teachers. Some described financial implications for school districts due to the cost of personal protective equipment, computers and equipment, janitorial supplies, professional development, classroom enhancements, and heightened use of sick leave by teachers and staff complying with public health regulations. Others highlighted the unique impact of the pandemic on international students and how this will affect school district budgets.

Survey Highlights

- Question 1: Education was sixth most common topic.
Key themes: increase funding and improve access to affordable, quality education.
 - Question 3: K-12 education received 5.6 cents.
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Capital Funding

The Committee received several recommendations for increased capital funding for playground equipment, the annual facilities grant, and seismic upgrades. The BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils highlighted the importance of playgrounds for the physical and mental well-being of children during the COVID-19 pandemic and advocated for increased funding for the Playground Equipment Program. Some organizations, including the Surrey Teachers Association, described the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing requirements on schools and noted the need to consider different approaches to school design.

School District No. 60 (Peace River North) and School District No. 57 (Prince George) emphasized that the annual facilities grant for capital maintenance is insufficient for the growing demands of their aging infrastructure, noting the poor condition of many of their facilities. School District No. 57 (Prince George) also explained that their operating budget and the annual facilities grant funds are allocated and prioritized to address the most critical maintenance needs which means other important maintenance work is often postponed. School District No. 5 (Southeast Kootenay) highlighted a number of challenges related to aging facilities including Mount Baker Secondary School which is 70 years old and requires major renovations and emergency repairs.

Several school districts and organizations highlighted the need for seismic upgrade funding. School District No. 38 (Richmond) shared that 34 out of 48 schools in Richmond have been evaluated as high seismic risk. Similarly, the Surrey Teachers Association noted that approximately 79,000 students are in schools which are at the three highest risk levels for a seismic event, and they are not aware of any work currently being done on those schools.

School districts also discussed policies related to capital funding with a focus on contribution requirements, the need to maintain limited fiscal reserves, and Ministry Area Standards. The Surrey District Parents Advisory Council and School District No. 43 (Coquitlam) shared frustrations about the practice of requiring school districts to contribute funds to capital projects and the pressure this places on school districts. The BC School Trustees Association explained the importance of recognizing the need for school districts to maintain limited financial reserves to properly manage emergent financial needs and fluctuations in both funding and revenues. The Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education advocated for a review of Ministry Area Standards to ensure that they align with the new curriculum, which emphasizes hands-on learning, and to include provisions for art, music and performing spaces in elementary schools.

Funding Formula

Several submissions discussed changes to the funding formula and called for equitable and predictable funding for school districts. School District No. 38 (Richmond) noted some negative impacts to metro school districts as a result of implementing changes to the funding allocation. They explained that when the new Equity of Opportunity supplement was introduced, the Vulnerable Student supplement was eliminated and the Education Plan supplement was reduced, resulting in the district losing \$846,000 in vulnerable student funding. The Equity of Opportunity supplement was also a focus for School District No. 41 (Burnaby) who explained that one-third of the supplement, which they use to support the Settlement Workers in Schools program, is calculated based on the 2011 National Household Survey and the 2016 Census, neither of which include data for most current newcomers to Canada in their schools.

School District No. 60 (Peace River North) highlighted challenges related to transportation funding, the Vancouver School Board drew attention to COVID-19 related funding, and the Conseil Scolaire Francophone de la Colombie-Britannique (CSF) advocated for funding for their unique school district. School District No. 60 (Peace River North) explained that they spend 4.1 percent of their operating expenditures transporting students to school and requested that the ongoing funding formula review address transportation challenges in rural and remote districts. With regard to the impact of COVID-19 on school district funding, the School District No. 39 (Vancouver) noted that the funding formula will need to be re-evaluated to reflect the increased reliance on technology and access to learning platforms required for a hybrid model of education. The CSF referred to the Funding Model Review Panel's final report, which concluded that the Ministry of Education should work with them to develop a unique school district factor that recognizes the special characteristics of the CSF, and advocated for funding to implement related changes to the funding allocation system.

Independent and Private Schools

A few submissions highlighted the value of independent schools and discussed recent changes to funding in the independent school sector. The Federation of Independent School Associations in BC stated that this change, announced in May, has resulted in reduced funding which has caused difficulties for independent

online schools who had already committed to contracts for teaching and support staff and to lease agreements. The SelfDesign Learning Foundation expressed concern that this funding change may not have considered the impact on children with special needs. They recommended maintaining funding levels from Budget 2019 for online distributed learning programs and increasing funding for special needs students. Similarly, Heritage Christian Online School highlighted that independent distributed learning schools have become a safe haven for students who have been bullied or whose learning needs have not been met in the public school system and explained that a reduction in funding will force many families to choose an educational option that has not worked for them previously. The value of independent distributed learning schools was also emphasized by individuals including Lynn Hale and Timothy Schindel who noted that these schools support students for whom many alternative school formats have not been able to produce successful learning opportunities and allow for a method of teaching that better complements students' learning styles.

Other organizations advocated for the elimination of public funding for private schools. The Institute for Public Education BC noted that subsidies for private schools have increased substantially and referred to studies which found that 78 percent of British Columbians oppose providing taxpayer funds for elite private schools. The BC Humanist Association conducted a review which found that nearly two-thirds of every dollar spent on independent schools goes to a Christian or Catholic school, which is significantly disproportionate with the overall makeup of the province.

Operational Funding

A number of school districts and organizations highlighted the need for funding for COVID-19 related costs, including increased cleaning staff, supplies, hygiene, and implementation of technology to support remote learning. They also described the impact of the pandemic on revenue; for example, School District 38 (Richmond) explained that provincial funding accounts for 88 percent of the district's funding with the remaining 12 percent coming from international students, facility rentals, investment income, and other sources, which have been impacted by the pandemic. They support a new funding allocation model that aims to provide funding that is responsive, equitable, stable, predictable, flexible, transparent and accountable. Similarly, the BC School Trustees Association explained that while it may appear that boards of education will be finishing the year with larger than normal operational surpluses as a result of the suspension of in-class instruction, much of this money will need to be spent in the upcoming school year on COVID-related costs. They also noted that if the current context continues beyond the next school year, there will be fewer international students in BC, resulting in large losses of operating revenue for many districts. With regard to staffing, the BC Teachers' Federation noted that school districts are facing cost pressures due to the increased use of sick leave by teachers and staff complying with public health regulations. They stated that districts must have the resources to hire replacement staff as necessary.

The Committee also received many requests for predictable and increased operational funding. School District No. 43 (Coquitlam) was of the view that education underfunding is a chronic problem and increases to funding have fallen behind inflation. School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast) shared that their board has seen significant cost increases due to inflation and additional salary costs as a result of provincially bargained agreements; however, they did not receive the funding to meet those costs in the current budget year. They also noted that school boards are facing additional, unfunded pressures to address systemic gaps in areas such as mental health, counseling, and inclusion. They explained that without increasing the overall funding for education, sustaining current operations and programs while meeting public expectation for increased services becomes more and more challenging.

Métis Nation British Columbia requested funding for their advancing Métis education, policy, research, programs and services for early years programs and K-12 education. A key priority as part of this is the development of an education commitment agreement with the province to support and strengthen government to government relationships on core education operations, including Métis Chartered Community engagement and research and Métis cultural resources and operation.

Programming and Curriculum

Several organizations highlighted the value of arts programming and called for increased funding to recognize the arts as essential to the goals of the curriculum. The Surrey Board of Trade and the Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education noted that incorporating arts education into student learning increases creative and critical thinking skills; improves communication and social understanding and responsibility; and improves performance in other subject areas. They added that arts programs are crucial for developing the skill sets and attitudes that contribute to a strong democracy and prosperous economy. AIRS (Artist-in-Residence Studio Program) explained that the arts are especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic when children are experiencing unprecedented degrees of social disruption through physical distancing, isolation, and ambient fear and need tangible ways to access and process their feelings.

Some organizations also recommended increased funding to implement the new curriculum. For example, the Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education reported that funding to fully support the new curriculum including materials, books, and technologies, as well as supports to Indigenize the curriculum are lacking.

The Committee also heard about the need to invest in resources to include more diversity in the curriculum. Several individuals, including Ceileigh Mangalam, advocated for funding to develop a new curriculum that includes histories of Indigenous, Black, and immigrant narratives. Similarly, School District No. 39 (Vancouver) emphasized the need to include Black history more fully in the K-12 curriculum, both in the general curriculum and in specific courses, which they explained would be most effectively achieved at a provincial level. They also noted the importance of providing anti-racism training to all staff in the educational community.

Other submissions in this area advocated for the use BC published books in schools and for education programs designed in collaboration with industry experts. The Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia noted that incenting the use of BC published books in schools would ensure that students have access to books that reflect their communities and experiences while also supporting the BC book publishing industry. The Resource Municipalities Coalition shared their view that early education in schools on science, energy, resource generation and sustainability is essential for a well-rounded understanding of the energy industry and recommended collaborating with experts to develop educational programs in this area.

Remote Learning

The BC Teachers' Federation and other organizations noted that the move to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic exposed inequities with respect to access to technology and broadband internet. Many school districts offered devices and technical assistance to students and their families to address this issue. For example, School District No. 41 (Burnaby) shared that they distributed 1,050 laptops from the existing school inventory to individual students, connected families to programs to provide internet connectivity, and provided IT support to families. In light of this, they recommended that districts be provided supplemental funding for actual technology costs incurred to provide students with access to education during the

COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the Institute for Public Education BC noted that if educational activities require access to technology outside the classroom, the school must have the resources to ensure that every student has this access. Lord Roberts Elementary Parent Advisory Council noted that when they attempted to provide the technology families needed for remote learning, they found that their iPads were too old to be used for many applications including Microsoft Teams.

Staffing, Recruitment and Retention

The BC Teachers' Federation explained that according to labour market projections, BC schools will require more than 18,000 new teaching staff over the next decade and recommended dedicated funding for teacher recruitment and retention initiatives across all school districts. Recruitment in rural and remote districts was of interest to School District No. 60 (Peace River North) who shared their struggles in filling vacant teaching positions. They explained that they compete with northern Alberta, where there are incentives for teachers working in rural and remote settings, to attract teaching staff. They encouraged incentives such as forgivable student loans or supplemental housing compensation to recruit teachers to rural communities. They also described recruitment issues for support staff positions and recommended a review of CUPE local market rates and mechanisms.

The Committee also received many recommendations related to custodial staff, IT staff, nurses, principals and vice principals, and support staff. The BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association discussed their goal to provide a provincial negotiation structure for principals and vice-principals in BC which they believe will ensure economic efficiencies and equity of supports for students by re-directing school district resources away from contract discussions. They noted that with 60 school district employers, there is inconsistency and inequity in the terms and conditions of principal and vice-principal employment; however, the role of principals and vice-principals is statutory and identical across BC. They added that BC is the only jurisdiction in Canada that does not allow principals and vice-principals to negotiate at the provincial level. With respect to custodial workers, Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia noted concerns over the limited dayshifts and daytime hours, which is threatening their ability to perform the work vital to maintaining a safe and healthy learning environment for students. Furthermore, they noted that understaffing and overwork in this area is a health and safety issue for all staff and students, especially now that sanitization is more important than ever due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many organizations and school districts observed a shortage of education assistants across the province and advocated for increased funding and training for education assistants. The Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia discussed staffing levels and working conditions for education assistants, and expressed concerns about insufficient hours. They explained that shifts generally range from four to six hours per day meaning that many education assistants are not earning living wages, and either struggle to make ends meet, or are forced to stitch full-time hours together by working multiple jobs. School District No. 38 (Richmond) observed significant recruitment challenges in attracting qualified education assistants due to current compensation levels and conditions of work. In her presentation to the Committee, Cindy Dalglish advocated for the creation of standards of practice for education assistants, noting that education programs for education assistants vary greatly, ranging from two to 45 weeks, leading to inconsistent skill sets.

Students with Special Needs

Submissions in this area highlighted the need for increased funding for resources and supports for students with special needs as well as funding to support early identification and intervention. The Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education observed that the percentage of students with designations is increasing and wait times for assessments are long. School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast) noted that targeted funding for students with special needs is not nearly enough to provide sufficient resources for these students and as a result, school districts spend, on average, double the amount they receive to support these students. They added that some districts have a significantly higher proportion of students who require additional supports, which can either place pressure on general operating budgets or lead to inequitable service levels. School District No. 5 (Southeast Kootenay) shared that approximately 12.5 percent of their student population requires additional support, and as such, the district will have to contribute over \$4 million in funding for students with special needs next year.

The Committee also received a few specific requests with respect to the funding model for students with special needs. School District No. 41 (Burnaby) was of the view that educational supports and parental expectations to provide access to education for students with special needs into inclusive classrooms were not sufficiently contemplated when the existing funding formula was created. The BC Teachers' Federation explained that school districts receive supplemental funding to cover the additional needs of students with "low incidence" designations; however, about half of students with an identified need have "high incidence" designations for which there is no additional funding. They recommended introducing per-student funding amounts for high incidence designations, including children with learning disabilities and those requiring moderate behaviour support, into the funding formula. Inclusion BC encouraged prioritizing budget allocations that support inclusion of vulnerable students, with remaining dollars going to general education services as outlined by the Funding Model Review Panel. They highlighted that inclusive schools benefit all students and strengthen resilience because they are designed to respond to diversity as the norm and to readily adapt to changing needs.

Both the BCEdAccess Society and Inclusion BC advocated for expanding the mandate of the Representative for Children and Youth, or creating another body of independent oversight, to provide independent oversight as well as advocacy for children and youth with disabilities in the education system.

Vulnerable Students

Food security and school food programs emerged as an area of concern for many organizations and school districts this year. Backpack Buddies, an organization that fills backpacks for vulnerable children with all the food they need to make it through the weekend, explained that 172,000 BC children currently go hungry in the province. They noted that when schools were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of children lost access to the school breakfast and lunch programs they relied on for daily nutrition. Similarly, Island Food Hubs noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of food banks by families continues to grow. They highlighted the need for a dedicated, cohesive, and collaborative approach to food security and food systems. The Coalition for Healthy School Food, BC Chapter referred to studies that show that children and youth across Canada consume insufficient and unhealthy diets with low fruit and vegetable consumption which negatively impacts physical and mental health as well as academic performance. They explained that a universal healthy school food program would address immediate food needs, promote long-term positive health outcomes in children and youth, and stimulate and support local food economies.

With regard to student mental health, School District No. 43 (Coquitlam) shared that students facing mental health challenges are some of the most difficult to support and that school districts lack the expertise, training, and resources to attend to these children with a systemic therapeutic approach. The district noted that additional funding is required to ensure appropriate professional staffing resources are in place to support all children and teachers in addressing student vulnerability, mental health challenges and behavioural issues. Some organizations, including Take a Hike Foundation, noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the mental health challenges facing vulnerable youth including anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, addictions, trauma, food insecurity and hopelessness. To address these challenges, they recommended continuing to increase funding for evidence-based programs that embed mental health supports for vulnerable youth in the classroom.

Funding for Indigenous learners was another area of concern as School District No. 39 (Vancouver) noted that the six-year completion rate for Indigenous students in Vancouver is significantly lower than the provincial rate. They explained that funding needs to be provided at a provincial level to identify the best practices that exist in those districts with higher than average completion rates so that their strategies and pedagogy can be shared and implemented across the province.

Conclusions

Committee Members reflected on the wide and varied impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on K-12 education with respect to student mental health and wellbeing, capital and operational funding, safety measures, staffing, food security, and access to remote learning. They also acknowledged recent announcements about enhanced safety measures and additional resources for schools and recognized the need for ongoing support to enable all schools to operate in the “new normal”. The Committee highlighted the need to ensure that schools are safe for students and staff and were supportive of capital funding that prioritizes safety. Members also considered the significant impact of the pandemic on international students and how this affects revenue for both public and independent schools. With respect to remote learning, Committee Members acknowledged inequities in access to technology and the internet, noting that digital connectivity has emerged as an important issue across sectors (see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion).

In recognition of the impact of COVID-19 on students, Committee Members highlighted the need for increased, trauma-informed mental health supports and reflected on methods to reduce barriers and increase access points to these services. The Committee also noted that COVID-19 has exacerbated issues of food security as students did not have access to school food programs with the move to remote learning. Members were supportive of collaborative efforts involving both school districts and community partners to develop food programs (see also: Recommendation 31 in Economic Development).

Regarding staffing, the Committee recognized the challenge for principals and vice-principals who negotiate contracts across school districts with limited resources. Committee Members also remarked on the difficulty of recruiting and retaining teaching staff especially in rural and remote BC. They noted that many students from rural areas pursue post-secondary training in urban centres and do not return home upon obtaining their degree. Members discussed the notion of investing in post-secondary training in rural and remote areas to address this issue.

With respect to programming, the Committee recognized the need for a broad suite of programming and supports for students, including culturally safe programs. Members also supported recommendations with respect to incorporating diversity and anti-racism in the curriculum. They additionally discussed how

COVID-19 has increased isolation and anxiety for students and noted the value of arts education in helping students cope with these feelings as well as how arts supports all students.

Committee Members also highlighted the importance of early identification and intervention for students with special needs and noted that this issue also emerged in relation to social services (see also: Recommendation 112 in Social Services). They discussed the importance of providing appropriate programming and supports to meet the learning needs of students with special needs as well as the need for more education assistants. The Committee also acknowledged the value of independent online and distributed learning in providing flexibility for parents and students, particularly for students with special needs and diverse learning styles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Capital Funding

91. Ensure the safety of facilities for students and staff by sustaining capital investments in schools and providing flexibility of funding for new builds, seismic upgrades and maintenance, and leveraging opportunities for modernizing facilities.

Operational Funding

92. Sustain funding for costs related to hygiene, enhanced cleaning staff, supplies, personal protective equipment, and other resources and measures to ensure the safe operation of schools.

Programming and Curriculum

93. Fully fund the new curriculum and provide a broad suite of programs and teaching methods, including arts education and culturally safe programs, to support all students.
94. Fund the development of new curriculums that recognize diversity and systemic racism as well as training and resources for staff and school administrators to improve school culture.

Remote Learning

95. Ensure families and students have access to the technology required for remote learning, including both the hardware and internet access. [see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion]

Students with Special Needs

96. Increase funding for students with special needs, including funding for early identification and intervention, the provision of appropriate support programs, and the training and recruitment of education assistants. [see also: Recommendation 112 in Social Services]

Vulnerable Students

97. Ensure a range of options of trauma-informed mental health supports in schools with increased access points for students.
98. Encourage coordination and collaboration between school districts, community partners, parents, caregivers, and volunteers to support the development of school food programs. [see also: Recommendation 31 in Economic Development]

Public Safety and Justice

COVID-19

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to the justice system was highlighted during the consultation. The Law Society of British Columbia explained that the lack of investment in innovation and transformation to online systems for court systems prior to the pandemic contributed to challenges with access when the crisis began. Submissions recognized efforts to digitize court services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as virtual affidavits and witness signatures, as examples of how to improve access to justice through digitization.

Survey Highlights

- Question 1: Anti-racism, policing and reconciliation were the most common topic. Key themes: reallocate resources from policing to health and social services; and increase efforts to address system issues in all levels of government, including policing.
- Question 3: Justice and public safety received 2.5 cents.
- Question 4: One-third of respondents completed the 'other' field with re-allocating policing budgets to other services the most common response.

Access to Justice and Legal Aid

Several organizations, including the Professional Employees Association, Canadian Bar Association, British Columbia Branch, and Law Union of British Columbia, recommended providing additional funding to legal aid services for the expansion of eligibility, scope of services covered, and coverage limits. The Law Society of British Columbia indicated that many British Columbians have inadequate access to legal advice and representation due to income thresholds for eligibility and limits on coverage and, where coverage is available, few services are included and coverage is capped, regardless of whether a legal issue is fully resolved. This has left low-income British Columbians, even those who are able to receive some legal aid, to navigate the courts and deal with legal issues, such as child welfare issues, family relationship concerns, criminal charges and immigration issues, on their own.

A number of organizations drew attention to the need to improve digital legal services and fund the digital transformation strategy, highlighting access challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Law Society of British Columbia and the Canadian Bar Association, British Columbia Branch explained that funding for the strategy will especially improve access by providing smaller and remote communities, including Indigenous

communities, with public spaces to digitally access the courts and justice services. They also encouraged continuing the measures that were implemented during the pandemic.

The importance and benefits of restorative justice and the need for increased funding in this area was another key theme. The Vancouver Island Regional Restorative Justice Association, the Community Justice Centre of the Comox Valley and the Centre for Restorative Justice, Simon Fraser University explained that increased funding would enable their organizations to enhance community-based services and programs, increase awareness of available supports, and incorporate restorative justice programs in different sectors such as education and elder abuse. They explained that restorative justice programs save money for the criminal justice system, strengthen community safety, and increase confidence in the justice system.

The Prisoners' Legal Services, among other organizations, advocated for increased funding to accelerate implementation of the First Nations Justice Strategy and increased investment in cultural supports and safety within the justice system. The Canadian Bar Association, British Columbia Branch shared that funding this strategy is key for completing transformational change in the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the justice system, including the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the justice system and noted that the strategy includes restorative justice initiatives, expansion of Indigenous courts, and legal aid services.

Métis Nation British Columbia noted that they created a Justice Council and, with the provincial government, signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2019 for the development and implementation of a joint Métis justice strategy. They requested funding to address their key priorities to establish a secretariat to support this work, as well as support Métis people with navigating and interacting with the justice system.

The Committee also heard about the need to protect and support vulnerable populations. The BC Network of Child and Youth Advocacy Centres advocated for funding for child and youth advocacy centres, highlighting how these centres provide integrated services to respond to crimes against children and help families navigate complex court processes and seek justice for vulnerable children. Health Justice recommended creating and funding an independent mental health advocacy service for mental health detainees as recommended by the Ombudsperson in his March 2019 report, *Committed to Change: Protecting the Rights of Involuntary Patients under the Mental Health Act*. Health Justice stated that BC is one of the few Canadian jurisdictions without any form of independent mental health advocacy service for mental health detainees. They explained that this service is necessary to ensure detainees have access to legal advice upon detention as well as assistance in exercising their legal rights. The Canadian Bar Association, British Columbia Branch and the Law Union of British Columbia also supported establishing an independent legal advice and advocacy service, explaining that those detained involuntarily are vulnerable under the *Mental Health Act*.

The BC Wrongful Death Law Reform Society described the lack of justice for parents who lose their children due to wrongful death. They noted that currently only the financial dependents of income earners may bring a meaningful claim for damages against the wrongdoer who caused the death and that this leaves parents without the ability to seek justice for the loss of their children. They explained that wrongful death accountability legislation would be an improvement over the current system of fatality compensation by broadening the law to victims who are routinely excluded, such as seniors, people with disabilities, and minors.

The BC Notary Association acknowledged the Committee's recommendation last year with respect to expanding the notary scope of practice. They noted that they have been developing a brief to propose this

expansion, including the ability to prepare testamentary trusts, to advise and process a probate application and to incorporate a company.

Correctional Services

Presentations by Prisoners' Legal Services, the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce, and the BC Government and Service Employees' Union discussed ongoing concerns in correctional services, including overcrowding, understaffing, and mental health supports. The Committee heard from Prisoners' Legal Services that limited care is available for the large proportion of prisoners who suffer from trauma, addiction, and other mental health disabilities. They further noted that when prisoners are released into the community without adequate mental health supports, this increases the risk of recidivism.

The BC Government and Service Employees' Union discussed the issue of overcrowding and insufficient number of staff in facilities. They pointed out that this has caused safety concerns for both staff and prisoners, and requested an increase in investment in frontline correctional staff to address these issues.

The Committee also heard about the need for culturally safe supports for prisoners. The Prisoners' Legal Services expressed that Indigenous prisoners often state that they do not trust prison staff and are uncomfortable sharing their traumatic experiences with non-Indigenous people in a prison environment. They noted that the BC First Nations Justice Council has developed a First Nations Justice Strategy which calls for an expansion of culturally based programs throughout the corrections system. They recommended funding for these initiatives within the strategy as it will help address the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the justice system.

Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Assault

Several non-profit organizations described gaps in the provision of emergency response to sexual assault and the access to appropriate and trauma-informed care for survivors of sexual assault. The Victoria Sexual Assault Centre noted that research shows that survivors experience better post-assault outcomes if they access trauma-informed and culturally safe care immediately following the assault; however, many survivors across British Columbia do not have access to the necessary supports as the availability of these services depends on the location of survivors. The Ending Violence Association of BC explained that sexual assault response is not guided by a provincial policy or best practices. They pointed out that often the responders to this complex trauma have been provided with little to no training or direction, which is leaving many sexual assault survivors without adequate care. North Shore Women's Centre emphasized that sexual assault is a pervasive social issue requiring culture change to reduce victimization.

The Committee heard that sexual assault is not only a criminal justice or public safety issue; it is also a health issue. The Victoria Sexual Assault Centre stated that given the long-term health impacts and associated costs of trauma to individuals and society, care that also increases access to additional services has important, positive consequences for survivors and their communities.

These organizations further pointed out the need for funding and resources for culturally safe supports and services for marginalized individuals, including Indigenous, gender diverse and Two Spirit survivors of sexual assault. The Urban Native Youth Association explained that, due to discrimination, transgender and Two Spirit people face higher rates of sexual violence and are less likely to have access to safe supports, as many organizations providing services to survivors are trans-exclusionary or trans-unaware. Additionally, they

shared that negative experiences with service providers lead many transgender and Two-Spirit people to avoid accessing care following an assault. They shared that best practice dictates that strong programs are informed and led by their user base.

The YWCA Metro Vancouver highlighted the need for support for individuals experiencing intimate partner violence, which has increased due to COVID-19. Without additional supports, including legal aid, women experiencing violence risk being driven further into poverty, being victimized or losing custody of their children. The Law Union of British Columbia noted that the current legal aid funding for family law matters is not adequate to ensure access to justice for survivors of intimate partner violence. Without additional funding to meet growing demand, the gap in access to justice for women and other disadvantaged groups experiencing intimate partner violence will continue to grow.

Living in Community, a multi-stakeholder initiative that works to create greater understanding around sex work issues, highlighted the necessity for support of programs and services that promote and ensure the safety of all individuals engaged in sex work, regardless of the type of sex work and without the sole focus being on exiting. They emphasized that not all sex workers are in a place to, or want to, exit sex work; however, they still have a right to safety and security.

Ground Disturbance

The British Columbia Common Ground Alliance explained how homeowner-caused damage to underground infrastructure, such as telecommunications, water, sewers and natural gas lines, is growing. They stated that such damage not only interrupts access to utility services, it also has environmental impacts, results in costly repairs, and pulls finite emergency resources away from critical need. To prevent homeowner-caused damage to underground infrastructure, the British Columbia Common Ground Alliance recommended requiring homeowners to use the BC 1 Call services before they dig. They explained that by calling or clicking BC 1 Call, a free call and service, homeowners receive all of the locate requests that they need to keep them digging safely.

Natural Disaster and Emergency Preparedness

The Committee heard about the imperative of developing systems, capacities and infrastructure to protect British Columbians from wildfires, floods, earthquakes, and climate-related natural disasters. The Insurance Bureau of Canada expressed the need to improve resiliency to natural catastrophes. Additionally, the Insurance Bureau of Canada and West Coast Environmental Law stated that investments in adaptive infrastructure can help communities adapt to climate change while also providing immediate, shovel-ready projects that generate jobs and economic stimulus.

The Insurance Bureau of Canada discussed the importance of preparing for a large earthquake and the impact it would have on individuals, communities, and the economy. They recommended the creation of a national earthquake resilience strategy that provides financial support for Canadian families and businesses should Canada be faced with a major earthquake.

Reflecting on previous years' wildfire seasons, the Insurance Bureau of Canada further noted that it is critical that future development in fire-prone regions take the risk of wildfires into consideration and implement policies that reflect the best practices available to prevent wildfire losses. They also pointed out that flooding is Canada's most frequent natural hazard and many areas in BC are susceptible to both coastal, urban and

riverine floods. Should a major flood event occur, it could cause significant losses and damages and place a burden on individuals and families living in these areas. They recommended increased investments in initiatives that promote the adoption of community resiliency to wildfires and floods. The Committee also heard that disaster mitigation infrastructure should consider the impact on local wildlife and fish; for example, flood prevention infrastructure such as sea walls and dykes should enable fish passage to avoid disruption of the local environment.

Policing

The Committee received over 150 submissions as well as thousands of survey responses regarding policing budgets and reallocating police funding to other areas, such as community social supports, education, and mental health and addiction counselling. They expressed that investing in community social services, especially for marginalized and vulnerable communities, could decrease crime and reduce the burden on justice system. Many submissions noted the need to transfer the responsibility of wellness checks from the police to social workers and mental health professionals citing that these professionals are more equipped to deal with mental health crises. Similarly, several submissions recommended expanding police officers' training to include de-escalation, cultural sensitivity, and mental health education. The Committee also heard about the need for a comprehensive anti-racism strategy for workplaces, communities and policing to address systemic racism across society.

The National Police Federation stated that over the past few years the RCMP in BC has experienced cutbacks, including wage freezes, which has impacted staffing, training and other resources. They noted that at the same time, policing has experienced an increase in demand for services. The National Police Federation pointed out that this has caused the demand for their services to surpass the number of police and their resources.

The Committee also heard from the National Police Federation about the City of Surrey's transition from the RCMP to a municipal police force. They shared their concern that this transition will be costly and that it will decrease the RCMP police resources that the province can use to respond to emergency management needs.

Conclusions

The Committee agreed on the importance of improving access to justice services and discussed a number of measures to enhance support in this area, including increasing funding for legal aid services. Members also acknowledged that to ensure access to the justice system, especially during crises like COVID-19, the adaptation of courts and court services to online platforms needs to be continued and accelerated. This is especially important for groups and communities who already struggle to access court services such as single parents and those living in rural, remote and Indigenous communities.

In their discussions, Committee Members recognized the benefits of community-based restorative justice programs such as saving money for the criminal justice system as well as strengthening community safety and increased confidence in the justice system. They also acknowledged the importance of funding for Indigenous justice programs and services to improve the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the justice system. The Committee recommended investment in both increased funding for community restorative justice programs and Indigenous justice programs.

Committee Members discussed issues with the province's correctional facilities, including overcrowding, understaffing and lack of comprehensive mental health and culturally safe supports. They agreed that investments in correctional services are needed to address these issues and to improve safety for both staff and prisoners.

With regard to supports for sexual assault survivors, the Committee supported comprehensive and distinction-based sexual assault crisis response with wrap-around supports. The Committee also acknowledged the ongoing issue of gender-based violence, and how it increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Members recommended investment in prevention, intervention, and recovery programs, noting the need for culturally safe supports for Indigenous women and girls, gender diverse people, and Two Spirit people. They also recommended supports for programs and services that promote the safety of all individuals involved in sex work as well as funding for a provincial bad date reporting system for sex workers.

The Committee discussed the increasing risks of wildfire and flooding in the province and how such events have greatly affected communities across BC. Committee Members agreed that the province's emergency response to earthquakes, wildfires and floods, and climate-related natural disasters needs continued investment. They emphasized that disaster resiliency infrastructure must consider the natural environment and wildlife; for example, seawalls that do not disrupt salmon passage.

The Committee acknowledged the numerous submissions and survey responses received regarding policing budgets and reallocation of funding to areas such as social services, mental health, and housing. Committee Members noted that an all-party committee, the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act, was recently appointed by the Legislative Assembly to examine how the *Police Act* can be modernized. They also recognized the support for a comprehensive anti-racism strategy for workplaces, communities, and policing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Access to Justice and Legal Aid

99. Increase investments in legal aid services across all eligible areas, including family law legal aid, mental health law, and prison law, to enable expansion of eligibility, scope of services covered, and coverage limits.
100. Increase funding for broad-based community restorative justice programs, including piloting models in areas such as elder abuse and education.
101. Increase investments in Indigenous justice programs and services, including ensuring a distinction-based approach for First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples.
102. Improve access to the courts and justice system through investments in digital transformation, including expanding the use of online platforms for virtual hearings, and continuing with pandemic-related measures such as remote swearing of affidavits and witnessing signatures.
103. Provide stable, dedicated operational funding to child and youth advocacy centres.

Correctional Services

104. Increase investment in correctional services, including funding and supports for frontline staff and mental health supports for prisoners.

Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Assault

105. Create a comprehensive, distinction-based emergency response to sexual assault with wrap-around supports that includes minimum standards, access to appropriate, specialized and trauma-informed care, and collaboration with community services, as well as the development of Indigenous-led, community-based programs, counselling and care programs for Indigenous and Two-Spirit survivors.
106. Invest in prevention, intervention, and recovery programs and supports for people facing gender-based violence.
107. Provide funding for programs and services that promote the safety and security of all individuals who engage in sex work, without the sole focus being on exiting.
108. Fund a provincial bad date reporting system for individuals who engage in sex work who experienced harassment, assault or other types of violence while working.

Ground Disturbance

109. Require all homeowners to contact B.C. 1 Call prior to digging on their property to avoid any damage to underground infrastructure.

Natural Disasters and Emergency Preparedness

110. Continue investing in prevention, mitigation, adaptation, response and recovery for wildfire, flood and climate-related natural disasters, while also protecting local fish and wildlife, as well as earthquake response and resiliency.

Social Services

COVID-19

As with non-profit organizations in the health care sector, social services organizations stressed the financial impact of the pandemic on their organizations and the need for stabilization support. They described how demand for services increased while revenue decreased, and how one in five non-profit organizations may not survive the pandemic.

Submissions and presentations also highlighted how social and economic inequities have resulted in the pandemic affecting some groups, including women, vulnerable and marginalized communities, children and youth with special needs, youth in- and aging out-of-care, and individuals reliant on income and disability assistance, more than others. They explained that the pandemic revealed the need for additional resources to address gaps in services and supports. The importance of child care to economic recovery and the participation of women in the workforce was especially emphasized.

Some organizations also discussed how the pandemic revealed gaps with employment standards and protections. They particularly pointed to challenges with access to paid sick leave and how this is critical for responding to the pandemic.

Survey Highlights

- Question 1: Social services was the 2nd most common topic. Key themes: improve income and disability assistance; and improve labour and employment standards.
 - Question 2: Support paid sick leave for working British Columbians received the 5th most selections. Improve access to affordable child care received the 6th most selections.
 - Question 3: Children and family development received 3.2 cents; Affordable childcare received 4.4 cents.
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Children and Families

Several submissions and presentations discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for additional investments in child care and how child care is a key component of economic recovery and recommended increases to operational and capital funding for child care spaces. The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade highlighted how parents need flexible options to accommodate new child care needs as

parents and children are told stay home if sick. The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC emphasized that, in order to return to work, parents with young children need affordable child care programs that meet diverse needs, are culturally relevant, and offer non-traditional hours of care for shift and part-time workers.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and First Call: BC Child and Advocacy Coalition, discussed the importance of affordable and accessible child care and advocated for the expansion of the universal child care fee reduction program, along with the expansion of affordable child care programs. The YWCA Metro Vancouver explained that finding and paying for child care is an obstacle for BC families and the lack of accessible, affordable child care is keeping parents, especially women, out of the workforce.

The Committee also heard about the need for seamless before- and after- school care services where children start and end their day in the same education facility with familiar staff. The Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia explained that the 'seamless day' child care model would provide much needed child care spaces and relieve pressure on parents, contributing to economic recovery in a way that is sensitive to issues of gender equity as well as offer full-time hours for early childhood educators, which can help with ongoing recruitment and retention challenges. They also noted that public child care delivered by school districts has such measures built in as part of an existing robust public system with accountability and oversight infrastructure.

As it relates to staffing, a number of organizations suggested increasing funding for early childhood educators, including implementing a competitive provincial wage grid to address the issue of recruitment and retention. The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC pointed out that implementing a competitive provincial wage grid is a tool to ensure BC has the early childhood educators needed to reopen existing child care programs and meet the demand for services. Additionally, organizations such as the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce and BC Government and Services Employees' Union suggested increasing funding and grants to train early childhood educators to address the sector's staffing challenges. Increased investment in training was also supported by the Surrey Board of Trade.

Several organizations discussed challenges with accessing specialized services for children and youth with special needs. The Family Support Institute of BC stated that families are often met with exceptionally long waitlists for diagnostic assessments, which they need before their children can access services and supports. The BC Association for Child Development and Intervention explained that due to the long waits for assessments, many children age out of programs and miss critical early intervention therapies. Both organizations, along with the BC Family Hearing Resource Society, BC Parents of Complex Kids, and the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, BC Chapter, recommended increasing funding for organizations that provide programs and services to children and youth with special needs and their families in order to reduce wait lists and improve access to supports.

Similarly, the Family Support Institute of BC stated that the Children and Youth with Special Needs programs require a significant investment of funds to alleviate the wait times for many families who cannot access supports such as before- and after- school programs, respite programs, youth care, behavior support, equipment for mobility and communication, or interventions their children need to develop and grow. They also described how the eligibility standards of the program means families cannot access benefits, leaving many children without the necessary programs, supports and equipment they need.

Métis Nation British Columbia described their work promoting the rights of Métis children and families and developing a Métis-specific child and family services framework. They stated a need for additional resources

to support a number of open family service files and indicated that Métis Nation has the largest number of children in care in BC.

Several submissions also advocated for funding to strengthen the system of guardianship workers, foster parents and other caregivers when children with disabilities require going into care. The Family Support Institute of BC stated that, with the additional support, families can keep their children at home and access the supports and services their children need.

Community Social Services and Social Policy

Many submissions described the need for multi-year funding for community social services organizations to address significant revenue challenges as a result of the pandemic. Vantage Point explained that the non-profit sector saw a loss of revenue while demand for services increased. They, along with the Board Voice Society of BC, the Vancouver Foundation and Take a Hike Foundation, requested funding to stabilize the sector as well as means to increase their revenue, such as tax credits for donors during the economic recovery, so these organizations can continue to provide services to those in need. The BC CEO Network explained that services provided in this sector are often unique and agencies need the resources and infrastructure to meet increasingly complicated service expectations.

Organizations also pointed out the need to continue to support the Community Social Service Sector Roundtable and create a comprehensive framework that reflects the realities of the sector. The Pacific Community Resources Society explained that many of the services they provide are long-term and take a client-centered approach as they are often working with individuals with very complex circumstances; they therefore support a more outcome-orientated social policy model.

Increased funding for Community Living BC was another key theme. The Family Support Institute of BC noted that many supports and services for people with disabilities are underfunded resulting in significant wait times for services and supports as well as challenges with acquiring housing.

The Committee also received over 30 submissions calling for an increase to the rates provided to home share providers to match those of other family care residential options. The submissions described how current rates result in home share providers having to supplement the cost of living for the people they support out of their own contract rate, causing hardship to their households. They pointed out these rates have not changed since 2006 and need to be updated to reflect inflation.

Employment Standards

Committee Members received many submissions that spoke to the need for changes to employment standards and labour legislation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The BC Federation of Labour stated that permanent working conditions and supports, including a living wage, a plan for paid sick leave now and in the long-term, and the strengthening of workers' compensation and employment standards, are necessary to support workers with economic recovery. Many submissions discussed measures such as paid sick leave as a necessary tool to ensure a healthy and safe workplace for both responding to the pandemic as well as for general health reasons. The Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia explained that without paid sick leave requirements, workers cannot afford to stay home when sick.

The Chartered Professionals in Human Resources of British Columbia and Yukon noted that the nature of work is rapidly changing, especially as a result of the pandemic, and workers and businesses must adapt to

these new circumstances, including remote work. They explained that as workplaces become increasingly flexible, it is necessary to provide employers with a supportive regulatory environment to allow organizations to adopt more formal flexible work arrangements. The organization also discussed the impacts of remote work such as employee burnout and hyper-connectedness – being connected and available anywhere and anytime. They recommended addressing these issues by establishing formal policies to define expectations for the use of technologies, and awareness and training in time management and mental health in the workplace.

The Committee also received many submissions regarding the minimum wage and the implementation of a living wage. The Health Science Association of BC stated that BC has the highest poverty rate in Canada and encouraged government to build on the TogetherBC poverty reduction strategy by adopting an ongoing commitment to raising the minimum wage with regular and predictable future increases. They further recommended that a permanent fair wages commission be established to oversee the transition from the minimum wage to a living wage with a clear timeline.

UNITE HERE Local 40 discussed protection for workers, especially those in the hospitality sector, who were laid-off due to the pandemic. They stated that under the current employment standards regulations, workers do not have the adequate legal protections to ensure they can return to work and are not permanently laid off without severance. They stated that as the road to recovery begins, workers need protections such as the right to return to work and the right to first refusal.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business expressed concerns about the proposal to add diseases caused by communicable viral pathogens, including COVID-19, to Schedule 1 of the *Workers' Compensation Act*. They stated that this will add additional costs to employers' premiums and cause a lot of stress and costs to small businesses during a time of economic hardship.

Poverty Reduction and Social Assistance

Several organizations, including the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Health Sciences Association of BC, and the BC Health Coalition, advocated for increases to the income and disability rates and tying them to the Market Basket Measure and indexing to the cost-of-living. They explained that there is a discrepancy between the standards set by the \$2,000-a-month Canada Emergency Response Benefit and the income assistance rate of \$760 per month. The BC Alliance for Healthy Living further explained that income security is a strong predictor of health outcomes and pointed to poverty reduction as a way to improve health. The Committee also received requests to maintain the COVID-19 temporary increase to disability rates, increase earning exemptions thresholds, and lower administrative barriers.

Many organizations, including the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness, pointed out that the current income assistance shelter supplement has been frozen at \$375 per month for over a decade which does not represent current housing costs. They recommended that income assistance and rental supplements be increased to better reflect the cost of independent living.

Youth

The Committee received many submissions related to addressing the needs of youth in- and aging out-of-care, including several submissions sent in support of Fostering Change. Fostering Change noted that the

eligibility criteria of the Agreements with Young Adults program leaves many unsupported after the age of 19 and that youth aging out-of-care are more likely to experience adverse outcomes such as substance engagement, homelessness, and death. Fostering Change was of the view that making the supports such as the Agreements with Young Adults program universal and comprehensive would make for significant improvements and change the landscape of child welfare.

The Boys and Girls Club emphasized the need to support vulnerable youth with the mental and academic impacts of COVID-19. They explained that due to physical distancing, many BC youth are at risk of developing mental health issues, including trauma-related stress, anxiety, and depression and cited research which demonstrates that, compared to adults, youth are more vulnerable to the emotional impact of traumatic events that disrupt their daily lives. They also noted that social distancing separates young people from the people and programs that help them build resilience and provide protective factors that buffer them from harm, and expressed concerns that vulnerable youth will fall further behind academically due to long school absences stemming from COVID-19. They requested funding to provide vulnerable youth, at up to 20 provincial locations, with a proven model of wrap around supports to reduce COVID-19 related mental health issues and to develop skills to thrive outside of high school.

Right to Play requested funding to maintain their Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program which provides intensive training and capacity-building for local youth workers to deliver focused weekly play and art programming for Indigenous young people. Former PLAY program recipient, Jayden Tallio, spoke about his experience with the program in which he learned about bullying, suicide and helping peers, and found a new passion for photography. He emphasized the importance of continuing this program especially in small communities. Right to Play noted that their proposal will support Indigenous youth and communities in a number of ways, including by: providing sustainable community development and cultural reclamation; providing continued access to regular and consistent child and youth programming; and increasing capacity of local Indigenous youth workers, teachers, and recreation workers to deliver consistent child and youth programs across the province.

Investments in leadership programs, employment training, and cultural activities for Métis youth was a focus for Métis Nation British Columbia. They described their work in partnership with the Métis Youth British Columbia Committee, who is mandated to represent and advocate on behalf of Métis youth, as well as their work on facilitating discussions to find solutions for Métis youth issues and challenges.

Conclusions

Committee Members acknowledged the difficulty families face in finding accessible and affordable child care and agreed that continuing to invest in child care will be critical for economic recovery and the return of parents and caregivers, especially women, to the workforce. They supported investment in child care spaces and subsidies as well as a 'seamless day' model for child care to provide parents with flexible child care options. The Committee also recognized that the retention, recruitment and compensation issues within the early childhood education sector need to be addressed in order to ensure accessibility, affordability and quality child care options.

The Committee highlighted that waitlists for assessments and early intervention therapies need to be reduced. Committee Members noted that investments in the Ministries of Children and Family Development, and Health, to reduce wait times and improve access to assessments and early intervention therapies

will allow children and youth to get the necessary supports before they age out of programs (see also: Recommendation 96 in K-12 Education).

Members also discussed supports for youth in care and transitioning out of care as a critical area for action. They reflected on the need for more comprehensive supports to youth aging out-of-care to enable them to transition into independence successfully. The Committee also acknowledged mental health challenges for youth that are being exacerbated by COVID-19, and particularly recognized the impact on middle years youth (aged 10-14). Committee Members agreed on the need to provide wrap-around and life skills programs and supports, and pointed to the Boys and Girls Clubs and Right to Play as examples of organizations doing work in this area.

As with health care, the Committee recognized the need to provide stabilization support and funding to non-profit organizations in the social care sector so that they can continue to provide services to British Columbians (see also: Recommendation 65 in Health Care). Committee Members also supported the development of a comprehensive, outcome-focused social policy framework, including providing stable, multi-year funding to organizations providing community social services and addressing recruitment, retention and compensation challenges within the community services sector. They additionally supported increased funding for Community Living BC, including a review of the funding provided to home care providers, noting that the funding provided to home share providers has not increased in recent years.

Committee Members noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted social and economic inequities which has left some groups more affected by the pandemic than others. They recommended continued support and funding for BC's provincial poverty reduction strategy to help those groups. The Committee also examined barriers related to income and disability assistance. Members noted that the framework for income and disability assistance should be reviewed, including the provision of rental supplements, indexation of rates to cost of living, and earnings exemptions and earned income. They agreed that the framework needs to be more equitable and reflective of individual circumstances. The Committee additionally supported the development of a comprehensive program for assistive devices and medical equipment for people with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Children and Families

111. Continue to invest in affordable, accessible and quality child care, including increasing spaces, providing direct subsidies, and investing in a "seamless day" model of before- and after-school child care.
112. Provide funding to the Ministries of Children and Family Development, and Health to reduce wait times and improve access to assessments, early intervention therapies, early childhood education, infant development programs, health and medical supports, in-home supports, and before- and after- school programs for children and youth with special needs and their families. [see also: Recommendation 96 in K-12 Education]

Community Social Services and Social Policy

See Recommendation 65 in Health Care regarding charitable and non-profit organizations.

- 113. Support the development of a comprehensive, outcome-focused social policy framework, including providing stable, multi-year funding to organizations providing community social services and addressing recruitment, retention and compensation challenges within the community services sector.
- 114. Increase the funding level to Community Living BC, including reviewing the funding provided to home share providers.

Poverty Reduction and Social Assistance

- 115. Review the framework for income and disability assistance to ensure equitability and appropriate consideration of individual circumstances, including reviewing the provision of rental supplements, indexing rates to cost of living, and examining earnings exemptions and earned income.
- 116. Invest in a comprehensive program for assistive devices and medical equipment for people with disabilities.
- 117. Continue to fund and support BC's poverty reduction strategy TogetherBC.

Youth

- 118. Improve the system of care to ensure it will allow youth to age out of care and transition into independence with the necessary financial, emotional, and physical supports including mental health support, counselling, family planning, Indigenous and other cultural practices; life skills; and job skills training.
- 119. In recognition of how COVID-19 has exacerbated mental health challenges, invest in wrap-around programs and services for vulnerable youth, including through organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club and Right to Play.

Transportation and Transit

COVID-19

Several themes were highlighted with respect to the impact of the pandemic on transportation, particularly with respect to active transportation and public transit. There has been an increase in the use of active transportation and bike sales have soared while transit ridership plummeted as British Columbians sought safe, healthy ways to travel and be active. The David Suzuki Foundation cited a poll conducted during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic response which found that 91 percent of Canadians support creating more space for walking and cycling, separated from vehicle use.

With respect to public transit, the Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation observed that TransLink ridership dropped by over 80 percent. They also noted that due to physical distancing measures, vehicle capacity was reduced, making it impossible to reduce costs by cutting services without leading to unsafe overcrowding. Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 1724 highlighted the percentage increase in HandyDART trips used to access health services during the COVID-19 pandemic while also stressing challenges for HandyDART workers, who are ineligible for the provincial government's pandemic pay for front-line workers, and must work in close proximity to clients where physical distancing is often impossible.

Survey Highlights

- Question 3: Public transportation received 4.3 cents; Roads, highways, and bridges received 1.9 cents.
-

Accessible Transportation

Individuals and organizations highlighted the value of HandyDART service for seniors, which is especially important given BC's aging population, in advocating for increased and expanded HandyDART service. The Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1724 explained that increasing service could reduce long-term care and hospital stay expenses. Save Our Northern Seniors called for increased HandyDART services in rural areas where there are reduced services on weekends and at night.

Active Transportation

Many submissions framed investment in active transportation as a way to promote physical activity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The British Columbia Cycling Coalition explained that if 10 percent of British Columbians were to replace much of their driving with cycling, walking and transit, one-third of the 10-year transport-related greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals could be met in one year. The Comox

Valley Cycling Coalition highlighted the cost-effectiveness of investing in active transportation infrastructure, explaining that for the same cost of four to six kilometres of new city roads, or eight kilometres of two-lane road widening, over 150 kilometres of sidewalks, and 250 kilometres of separated cycle tracks could be constructed. Organizations also emphasized the need for investment in infrastructure to encourage British Columbians to pursue active transportation; for example, HUB Cycling noted a lack of high-quality, connected cycling facilities across Metro Vancouver. Both HUB Cycling and the British Columbia Cycling Coalition advocated for increased per capita spending targets, noting that BC currently spends about \$1.50 per person annually on active transportation in comparison to the Netherlands and Denmark who spend \$48 and \$34 respectively. HUB Cycling also suggested making electric and adaptive bicycles more accessible through cost financing or the elimination of the PST on these bicycles, while Act Urgently suggested providing low cost financing, subsidies, rebates, and funding for community bike shops to ensure everyone has access to and can maintain bicycles, electric cycles and adaptive cycles.

Several submissions focused on safety and active transportation infrastructure. The Greater Victoria Cycling Coalition noted that the shift from public transit to cycling will require funding to support the building of bikeways as well as training for those who are taking up cycling for the first time, or for the first time in many years. Similarly, the West Kootenay Cycling Coalition observed an increase in cycling by people who are not very comfortable on their bikes who are then mixing with traffic which can lead to conflict, incidents, and potential tragedies.

Auto Insurance

The Insurance Bureau of Canada stated that BC drivers pay the highest average premiums for car insurance in Canada yet receive similar benefits to drivers in other provinces when making a claim. They suggested that fostering more choice and competition would help lower premiums and improve the affordability of auto insurance for drivers across the province. Auto insurance was also a priority for the BC Wrongful Death Law Reform Society who were of the view that no-fault insurance will make roads less safe and increase bureaucracy. They advocated for withdrawing support for no-fault legislation and focusing on a provincial road safety strategy to make roads safer and reduce costs.

Ports and Marine Shipping

In their presentations, the BC Marine Terminal Operators Association, the British Columbia Maritime Employers Association, and Global Container Terminals highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ports and marine shipping and described efforts to remain safely open during this time. The BC Marine Terminal Operators Association noted that terminals have incurred hundreds of thousands of dollars in new monthly costs associated with COVID-19 protocols. They added that the pandemic has led to an unprecedented level of uncertainty affecting terminal operations regarding both short- and long-term investment decisions in BC ports. The Association advocated for policies and supports to enable operators to remain competitive and meet Canada's demand for terminal services through the recovery and beyond.

The British Columbia Maritime Employers Association additionally highlighted the federal Port Modernization Review as an opportunity to ensure that policies and a governance framework that allows BC ports to grow is realized. Similarly, Global Container Terminals noted the need to ensure the right type of regulatory and financial supports are provided to the waterfront community to maintain the essential services for BC's and Canada's trade needs. They also encouraged continued active engagement in the Gateway Transportation

Collaboration Forum and a focus on prioritizing projects that already have private sector partners to support them. In their written submission, the Prince Rupert Port Authority outlined their intermodal expansion program, which is designed to support trade and the growth of their container business, and recommended establishing cost-sharing agreements for key projects.

Public Transit

Regarding public transit, some submissions, including those from Metro Vancouver, the City of Vancouver, and the Urban Development Institute Pacific Region, referred specifically to TransLink, noting the decrease in ridership due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation noted that while ridership has started to increase with the BC restart plan, transit usage is still 70 percent below normal and is not expected to fully recover until a vaccine is widely available. They cited projected losses in 2020 and 2021 between \$500 million and \$1.4 billion. In recognition of this, they urged the province to continue working with TransLink on a recovery and rebuilding strategy, and to prioritize mobility as a critical component of the province's long-term economic recovery. Similarly, the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade shared results of a survey that found 36 percent of respondents across the Greater Vancouver region plan to increase use of their car or car ownership because of COVID-19. To offset an expected spike in congestion and pressures on the transportation system as individuals shift from public transit to single occupancy vehicles, they suggested working with TransLink to explore ways to re-establish confidence in the public transit system.

Other individuals and organizations highlighted the importance of public transit in the Capital Regional District. The University of Victoria Students' Society shared that thousands of people in the region rely on public transit as their primary mode of transportation and advocated for greater investment into public transit to support the expansion of late-night service hours, increased frequency on popular routes, new bus routes connecting rural communities to core areas, the electrification of bus fleets, and more affordable service. Lisa Helps, Mayor of Victoria, shared that investment in public transit expansion and electrification is a key priority for the Capital Regional District.

Investment in public transit was a priority for many organizations and individuals who cited multiple benefits related to the environment and the reduction of congestion. The Better Transit Alliance of Greater Victoria noted that transportation is the second-largest source of greenhouse gas pollution in Canada and explained that increasing road capacity in urban areas leads to more traffic, greenhouse gas emissions, and toxic air pollution. They advocated for stimulus and recovery funding to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas pollution from transportation and creating healthy, livable communities. Both the Better Transit Alliance of Greater Victoria and the Island Transformations Organization called for more bus networks and bus lanes which they note reduce the cost per passenger and allow ambulances to travel quickly and safely. Cubic Transportation Systems also highlighted the need for urgent bus priority measures to ensure buses do not get stuck in worsening congestion.

A number of submissions focused on the environmental benefits of electric buses. The BC Government and Service Employees' Union, noting transportation's contributions to BC's greenhouse gas emissions, suggested that increasing and accelerating the electrification of the public transit fleet would have a significant environmental impact. Clean Energy Canada referred to estimates from TransLink which show that the life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions of electric buses will be 90 percent lower than current diesel buses. They encouraged coordination with the federal government to support the efforts of both BC Transit and TransLink

to build infrastructure to increasingly electrify their bus fleets, replacing end-of-life diesel buses with electric buses.

The Committee also heard requests with regard to public transit research and data. The Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium made funding requests for a smart mobility research and development program as well as a feasibility analysis and simulation-based planning initiative regarding BC Transit's deployments in several municipal fleets. They stated that these proposals will advance goals in reducing emissions, decarbonizing the transportation sector and stimulating new green technology companies in BC. Cubic Transportation Systems explained that commute patterns transcend traditional service boundaries and often include multiple operators; however, data sharing among operators often does not occur. They highlighted the value of mobility operators sharing data to achieve the best possible regional and provincial transport planning and public policy objectives.

Another common theme amongst submissions was a call to eliminate transit fees. The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition and Nathan Davidowicz called for free transit for children and youth, while the BC Federation of Labour suggested fare-free public transit throughout the province. These submissions suggested that pursuing these measures would strengthen equity and support poverty reduction.

Rideshare and Taxis

The Committee also received a couple of recommendations related to ridesharing regulations and requirements. Lyft suggested regulatory reforms that could be implemented to accommodate physical distancing orders such as allowing for the knowledge test to be taken online rather than in-person, especially in rural regions where ICBC testing centres are more limited and overstretched. They added that with large numbers of British Columbians finding themselves out of work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing for persons with recently expired Class 1, 2, 3 and 4 licenses to qualify as rideshare drivers without having to go through the commercial license process again would support the onboarding of drivers. The Surrey Board of Trade expressed similar views and suggested examining licensing requirements to help encourage participation in ridesharing and outlined additional potential improvements to the regulatory regime for ridesharing, including the absence of fleet size restrictions and the provision of 24/7 customer service.

Transportation Infrastructure

Some organizations, including the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade, called for general investment in transportation infrastructure, noting that prioritizing infrastructure projects will improve mobility, curb congestion, and reduce emissions. Island Transformations Organization suggested a revised funding strategy for transportation infrastructure projects that would require municipalities to pay a larger share by using land-value captured elements. They also recommended permitting regional and local governments to use tax increment financing to fund infrastructure projects as is done in Alberta and Ontario.

A number of organizations made recommendations related to reducing congestion. Cubic Transportation Systems explained that congestion on BC road networks not only contributes to environmental pollution and a lower standard in quality of life, it also costs the BC economy close to a billion dollars in lost productivity and time. To address this, they suggested reducing available roadway space for driving and increasing the cost of driving through measures such as mobility pricing or increases to the fuel sales tax.

The Committee also heard about the need for investment in transportation infrastructure in rural and remote areas. The North Peace Rural Roads Initiative encouraged investment in rural roads to retain jobs and stimulate the economy in the region. Similarly, the Resource Municipalities Coalition encouraged investment in infrastructure projects in remote communities in order to support the economy in these areas. Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative advocated for funding to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions along transportation corridors noting that the current rate of collisions involving large mammals along Highway 3 has raised concerns amongst agencies and the public regarding motorist safety.

The Committee also received a number of funding requests for specific transportation infrastructure projects, including the George Massey Tunnel replacement crossing, the E&N rail line, and infrastructure at Vancouver International Airport. The Richmond Chamber of Commerce was of the view that the George Massey Tunnel replacement crossing is a critical provincial project that must be prioritized and built expeditiously as a means of stimulating economic recovery. The Nanoose First Nation highlighted the impact of the E&N Railway right of way on their community. They explained that the right of way limits access to their reserve and the cost to build around the railway line is prohibitive. As a result, the land that they could use to build much need housing, further economic development, and enhance their community is not available. The BC Chamber of Commerce drew attention to projects in regions all across the province noting that transportation infrastructure is a key driver of economic development.

Conclusions

Committee Members recognized the increased use of active transportation as an alternative to transit during the COVID-19 pandemic and identified an opportunity to ensure the application of an active transportation lens to the development of new transportation infrastructure. Members also acknowledged recommendations with respect to making electric bicycles more affordable and noted recent investments in this regard. The Committee additionally discussed the health and environmental benefits associated with active transportation and supported funding for the provincial active transportation strategy.

With respect to public transit, Committee Members identified the need to expand transit systems in rural and remote BC. They also discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with respect to ridership, revenues and public health measures such as physical distancing, and recognized ongoing work to address some of the concerns highlighted in submissions. Members were supportive of a recovery strategy that further addresses these issues, including gaps in access to public transit throughout the province. The Committee also examined recommendations regarding transit fares and supported consideration of new pricing mechanisms for children, youth, and low-income families in order to promote equity. Committee Members further supported the adoption and deployment of electric buses while acknowledging challenges in adapting this technology for use in northern BC, as well as increased investments to expand HandyDART services.

The importance of ports and how they weathered challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic was another point of discussion with Committee Members recognizing the need to work with the federal government on port-related matters. The Committee also appreciated the number of requests for investments in specific transportation infrastructure projects across the province.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Accessible Transportation

120. Increase and expand HandyDART services.

Active Transportation

121. Fully fund the provincial active transportation strategy, including ensuring an active transportation lens is applied to the development of transportation infrastructure.

Public Transit

122. Develop a recovery plan for BC's transit and transportation sector, with participation by all levels of government, that strengthens funding models and addresses transit gaps in rural and remote communities.

123. Prioritize accelerated deployment of electric buses, including the necessary charging infrastructure, where feasible throughout the province.

124. Work with local governments and transit authorities to explore new pricing mechanisms to help make public transit more accessible for youth and low-income families.

Summary of Recommendations

Equity and Inclusion

Reconciliation

1. Provide sufficient resources to continue concrete action on the implementation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, including recognizing and addressing the needs of distinct First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

Diversity and Inclusion

2. In order to address ongoing inequities and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on vulnerable, marginalized and equity-seeking populations, ensure all ministries adopt a diversity and inclusion lens and recognize systemic barriers.
3. Increase programs and supports for equity-seeking groups who face systemic barriers.

Accessibility

4. Strengthen public construction policies to require new public construction projects to meaningfully meet accessibility best practices and standards.

Digital Connectivity

5. Work with the federal government and telecommunication companies to accelerate investments in extending and strengthening digital infrastructure and ensure the provision of affordable, equitable access to the internet across the province, with particular attention to rural, remote and Indigenous communities, in recognition of the critical importance of universal connectivity to the social and economic well-being of British Columbians.

Advanced Education

Adult Education and Literacy

6. Provide stable, multi-year funding for community literacy across BC.
7. Increase resources to adult education to provide a broader range of course offerings and ensure equity in the funding of adult students and school-age students.

Capital Funding

8. Invest in upgrading existing post-secondary infrastructure, including encouraging and leveraging opportunities to expand satellite campuses in rural, remote and underserved communities.

Indigenous Students

9. Support post-secondary institutions in advancing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls by ensuring post-secondary education is accessible to Indigenous learners and honours and recognizes Indigenous culture.

International Students

10. Create a provincial international student education strategy, in consultation with students, post-secondary institutions and other key stakeholders, which examines the business model, the cultural, academic and economic integration of international students, and intended goals and outcomes of post-secondary education.

Online Learning and Digital Infrastructure

11. Provide sufficient support to post-secondary institutions for teaching and learning tools, infrastructure and technology, and training to facilitate professional development for the online delivery of courses. [see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion]

Operational Funding

12. Explore mechanisms, such as allowing the use of accumulated surpluses, to provide post-secondary institutions with short-term flexibility to navigate the financial impacts of the pandemic.
13. Invest in post-secondary education and expanding the number of seats available to students as a means to facilitate economic recovery and address immediate and projected gaps in the labour market, including ensuring local training and reskilling opportunities and reducing barriers for underrepresented groups.

Technology, Trades and Skills Training

14. Provide flexible reskilling and upskilling opportunities in online and in-person formats with a lens to equity, reconciliation and accessibility, and recognize skills acquired through prior and experiential learning, to support workers displaced due to automation, shifts to digital technology and the pandemic, including promoting and expanding technology and trades-related training and careers.

Tuition Fees and Financial Assistance

15. Provide a multi-year extension to the BC Graduate Scholarship and expand its eligibility to graduate students in non-STEM disciplines.
16. Facilitate access to education by addressing financial barriers related to the direct and indirect costs of education, including child care and transportation.

Arts, Culture and Libraries

Arts, Culture and Libraries

17. Recognize the value of the arts and culture sector during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing recovery funding for the sector.
18. Support long-term recovery, innovation and adaptation in the arts and culture sector by providing increased, flexible, multi-year funding through the B.C. Arts Council, incenting individual and corporate donations, offering tax breaks for patrons to reengage in arts and culture activities, and working with other levels of government and community partners to increase investments in arts and culture infrastructure.

Digital Media, Music and Film

19. Provide multi-year funding for Amplify BC.
20. Invest in Creative BC to build the industry and leverage federal funding, including funding for domestic production.
21. Maintain existing film and production services tax credits and renew the book publishing tax credit, and review tax credits periodically for competitiveness with other jurisdictions.
22. Explore measures, such as tax credits or hiring incentives, to address inequities and barriers for underrepresented groups in the arts, culture and digital media industry.

Public Libraries

23. Provide sustained and reliable annual increases to the provincial operating grant for public libraries, including funding for training and professional development, and support the delivery of library services in Indigenous and rural communities.
24. Encourage collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to promote reconciliation programs in libraries.

Economic Development

Aerospace

25. Support research, development and innovation in BC's aerospace industry, including green technologies, and the creation of robust, local supply chains.

26. Increase funding for the British Columbia Air Access program to improve airport infrastructure and address challenges stemming from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in small, rural and remote communities.

Agriculture and Agri-Foods and Food Security

27. Review the AgriStability program to improve supports to farmers, including streamlining the administration of and supporting farmers with navigating the program.
28. Invest in infrastructure and applied innovation and agritech to help farmers adapt to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, and to adapt to changing labour markets.
29. Continue to explore investments in processing facilities and capacity in the province.
30. Develop policies that support agriculture productivity and regional production and collaborate with Indigenous governments in coordinating local producers, building capacity, creating space for community gardens, and supporting farmers' markets.
31. Continue to develop local food production, processing and distribution hubs, including investing in innovation and nutrition security, and prioritize funding for food security at the community and provincial level in emergency response planning, with the aim of improving food security and local agricultural capacity and productivity.
32. Provide a multi-year extension to the Tree Fruit Replant program to ensure stability and certainty.
33. Continue investing in the protection of domestic animals, livestock, and wildlife, including organizations such as the BC SPCA.

Forestry

34. Adopt policies and measures to encourage adaptation and innovation in the forestry sector, facilitate access to fiber, and support bridging and retraining of workers, in recognition of the ongoing evolving economic, global and environmental context.
35. Continue to explore market and product diversification in forestry by supporting economic incentives to drive investments into high-value products from the forest resource and providing ongoing support for Forest Innovation Investment.
36. Fund a transition to second growth harvesting and away from primary forests.

Labour and Immigration

37. Continue to fund the Sector Labour Market Partnerships program.
38. Improve measures, programs and policies for recruiting, training and retraining the skilled workforce required for BC's labour market, including working with the federal government on attracting and retaining skilled immigrants.

Mining

39. Examine making enhancements to the mining exploration and mining flow-through share tax credits to ensure BC remains globally competitive for mining exploration and investment.

Natural Resource Development

40. Continue funding the British Columbia Geological Survey and Geoscience BC.

Technology and Innovation

41. Support growth and innovation in BC's science and technology industry by exploring mechanisms to incent scaling up and commercialization, increase and retain the labour talent supply, and encourage expansion to rural and northern communities.

Rural Development

42. Provide funding to community organizations to support social, cultural and economic development and community resilience in rural, remote and northern communities.

Tourism

43. Provide urgent, targeted recovery funding that is accessible and flexible to the tourism sector, as well as supports to address pandemic-related costs such as personal protective equipment.
44. Support stabilization of the tourism sector with multi-year investments in recovery, infrastructure and destination development, and marketing, including exploring the provision of traditional and non-traditional financing options to tourism businesses, and incentives to British Columbians to stimulate safe provincial tourism and travel.

Environment

Clean and Renewable Energy

45. In recognition of the opportunity to use economic recovery to invest in climate action, ensure the CleanBC plan remains fully funded to advance legislation, regulations and programs to meet the established targets, including expanding and enhancing energy efficiency programs and continuing to support reductions in vehicle emissions.
46. Continue to explore opportunities for clean energy solutions, such as hydrogen, geothermal, solar, and bio fuels, including attracting private investment and technology and ensuring competitiveness, collaborating with Indigenous communities and other governments, creating partnerships with industry and universities on commercialization, incenting rural investment, and creating a stable policy framework.

47. Continue to use a climate lens for all infrastructure spending to provide an objective and transparent assessment of a project's compatibility with the CleanBC plan and BC's legislated greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.
48. Maintain a commitment to a cost-effective and predictable path to electrification in collaboration with industry.

Fish and Wildlife Conservation and Management

49. Increase funding for fish and wildlife conservation, management and data collection, including exploring potential revenue sources such as fees from hunting, fishing, natural resource and nature-based tourism enterprises for this purpose.
50. Prioritize biodiversity and species preservation to protect and recover species, in consultation with communities, Indigenous peoples and the business sector.

Invasive Species

51. Provide robust funding for education, prevention, monitoring, response and enforcement, including streamlining regulations to better monitor and manage high-risk pathways that introduce and spread invasive species, and ensuring an aggressive remediation process.

Parks and Recreation

52. Increase operational funding for BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC to support staffing, monitoring and enforcement, maintenance, land management planning, oversight of public health and safety, and recreational infrastructure and services, including promoting and supporting volunteer efforts.

Water

53. Advance water sustainability in British Columbia by providing a dedicated, sustainable, annual funding source.

Fiscal and Regulatory Policy

Budgetary and Taxation Policy

54. Ensure the budgetary and taxation framework is prudent and responsive, supports competitiveness, and proactively incorporates equity, reconciliation and climate action lenses to address short- and long-term challenges for individuals and businesses.

Co-operatives

55. Create opportunities to invest in and develop co-operatives by reviewing and implementing necessary taxation and regulatory changes.

COVID-19 Measures & Recovery

56. Continue to work with the federal government to ensure that federal and provincial programs to support individuals and businesses through the pandemic are responsive, including attaining the necessary transfers, identifying and addressing gaps, and transitioning emergency funding to targeted investments in recovery and financial relief based on individual and sectoral needs.
57. Ensure that economic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is embedded in recovery going forward to create multi-generational wealth and self-sustaining economies.

Employer Health Tax

58. Review opportunities to temporarily adjust the employer health tax in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses.
59. Invest in a broad base of public infrastructure that facilitates equitable recovery, such as road building and public transit, as well as a diverse range of smaller projects in local communities, parks and schools.

Liquor, Cannabis and Tobacco

60. Extend the initiative to allow restaurants, bars and tourism operators to purchase liquor at wholesale prices.

Local Governments

61. Pursue municipal finance reform to provide municipalities with a broader range of sustainable, predictable and reliable funding tools in order to address increasing financial pressures related to a growing asset base, aging infrastructure, climate change, housing challenges and the opioid crisis.

Luxury Tax

62. Review the luxury tax threshold for vehicles to eliminate its application on pick-up trucks and essential work vehicles.

Prompt Payment

63. Examine implementing prompt payment legislation.

Provincial Sales Tax (PST)

64. Increase monitoring and enforcement of BC tax laws and consider implementing public reporting for the payment of the PST by non-resident companies working in BC.

Health Care

Charitable/Non-Profit Sector

65. Provide urgent and stable funding to the charitable and non-profit sector so that they can continue to provide services to British Columbians, including exploring the provision of incentives to donate such as a donation-matching program, and increasing the charitable donation tax credit. [see also: Social Services, Community Social Services and Social Policy]

Chronic and Complex Diseases

66. Provide appropriate supports and services for British Columbians living with chronic and complex diseases, such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, arthritis, brain injury, cancer, diabetes, epilepsy, inflammatory bowel disease, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, and brain injury, including increasing investments in the Chronic Complex Diseases program.

Community Care and Seniors

67. Sustain investments and continue to address gaps related to staffing and care standards in long-term care, including training, recruitment and retention of qualified staff.
68. Increase investments in home support, including revising the regulated co-payment for the home support program to enable seniors to stay at home.

Dental Care

69. Explore creating a dental plan for low-income seniors who receive rent subsidies under the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters program, as well as providing dental coverage for low-income seniors in long-term care facilities.
70. Explore providing dentists with access to PharmaNet.

Digital Health

71. In recognition of the increased use and need of digital health during the pandemic, expand and accelerate investments in digital health infrastructure, such as telehealth, to improve and increase access to care for all British Columbians, with attention to needed investments in digital connectivity in rural, remote and Indigenous communities. [see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion]

Health Human Resources

72. Provide targeted, increased funding for training health care professionals in areas facing shortages with a focus on expanding capacity and resources within existing programs in smaller communities and ensuring opportunities for British Columbians in rural, remote and Indigenous communities to train locally.

Mental Health and Addiction

73. Continue investments in a cohesive continuum of services for mental health and addiction from prevention to intervention to recovery, including the provision of culturally safe supports and services, family supports, and services specific to children and youth.
74. Increase residential treatment capacity, including ensuring facilities provide appropriate, relevant care to meet the needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Pharmacare

75. Continue to explore with the federal, provincial and territorial governments the establishment of a universal pharmacare plan.
76. Review and address inequities with funding and benefits for medical equipment and technology, such as prosthetic and orthotic care and hearing aids and assisted listening devices.
77. Examine mechanisms in the taxation system to remove or rebate the PST for medical cannabis.

Primary Care

78. Expand the delivery of primary health care through team-based, multi-disciplinary models, such as community health centres, and ensure services and supports are integrated within these models to build relationships and facilitate access to care for marginalized communities.

Public Health

79. Provide free prescription contraception for all people in British Columbia.
80. Provide funding to pilot and assess the impact of providing reusable menstrual products to BC students in need.
81. Improve access to maternal health care across the province, with special attention to low-income families and other marginalized communities, including investing in accessible, culturally safe parent support programs for all types of families.
82. Align economic recovery investments with BC's Physical Activity strategy to promote physical activity. [see also: Recommendation 121 in Transportation & Transit]

Research

83. Invest in health science research, including providing ongoing funding to Genome B.C., and support innovative, small and medium enterprises with business development to thrive in the commercial market.

Rural and Remote Health Care

84. In consultation with rural communities, establish and fund rural health councils to act as advisory bodies to engage with rural British Columbians and inform decision-making on the provision of health care services to meet the unique needs of rural communities.
85. Improve access to health care services in rural, remote and coastal communities by increasing the provision of specialist services and transportation services, and better coordinating and aligning these services.

Surgical Capacity and Wait Times

86. Build on recent innovations, investments and best practices with streamlining and improving efficiency to increase surgical capacity and address wait times.

Housing

Affordable and Social Housing

87. Accelerate the building of a continuum of supportive and affordable housing across the province, including transitional housing for women facing violence, gender-specific supportive housing, and expanded housing options for people with disabilities, youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and low-income seniors.
88. Work with the federal government to expand investment in Indigenous housing.

Development

89. Explore ways to support local governments to approve new housing construction projects and accelerate housing supply by streamlining development processes and implementing the recommendations from the BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's 2019 Development Approvals Process Review.

Taxation

90. Review the property transfer tax thresholds and make any necessary adjustments to address the challenges related to home ownership due to the dynamic nature of the real estate market.

K-12 Education

Capital Funding

91. Ensure the safety of facilities for students and staff by sustaining capital investments in schools and providing flexibility of funding for new builds, seismic upgrades and maintenance, and leveraging opportunities for modernizing facilities.

Operational Funding

92. Sustain funding for costs related to hygiene, enhanced cleaning staff, supplies, personal protective equipment, and other resources and measures to ensure the safe operation of schools.

Programming and Curriculum

93. Fully fund the new curriculum and provide a broad suite of programs and teaching methods, including arts education and culturally safe programs, to support all students.
94. Fund the development of new curriculums that recognize diversity and systemic racism as well as training and resources for staff and school administrators to improve school culture.

Remote Learning

95. Ensure families and students have access to the technology required for remote learning, including both the hardware and internet access. [see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion]

Students with Special Needs

96. Increase funding for students with special needs, including funding for early identification and intervention, the provision of appropriate support programs, and the training and recruitment of education assistants. [see also: Recommendation 112 in Social Services]

Vulnerable Students

97. Ensure a range of options of trauma-informed mental health supports in schools with increased access points for students.
98. Encourage coordination and collaboration between school districts, community partners, parents, caregivers, and volunteers to support the development of school food programs. [see also: Recommendation 31 in Economic Development]

Public Safety and Justice

Access to Justice and Legal Aid

99. Increase investments in legal aid services across all eligible areas, including family law legal aid, mental health law, and prison law, to enable expansion of eligibility, scope of services covered, and coverage limits.
100. Increase funding for broad-based community restorative justice programs, including piloting models in areas such as elder abuse and education.
101. Increase investments in Indigenous justice programs and services, including ensuring a distinction-based approach for First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples.

102. Improve access to the courts and justice system through investments in digital transformation, including expanding the use of online platforms for virtual hearings, and continuing with pandemic-related measures such as remote swearing of affidavits and witnessing signatures.
103. Provide stable, dedicated operational funding to child and youth advocacy centres.

Correctional Services

104. Increase investment in correctional services, including funding and supports for frontline staff and mental health supports for prisoners.

Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Assault

105. Create a comprehensive, distinction-based emergency response to sexual assault with wrap-around supports that includes minimum standards, access to appropriate, specialized and trauma-informed care, and collaboration with community services, as well as the development of Indigenous-led, community-based programs, counselling and care programs for Indigenous and Two-Spirit survivors.
106. Invest in prevention, intervention, and recovery programs and supports for people facing gender-based violence.
107. Provide funding for programs and services that promote the safety and security of all individuals who engage in sex work, without the sole focus being on exiting.
108. Fund a provincial bad date reporting system for individuals who engage in sex work who experienced harassment, assault or other types of violence while working.

Ground Disturbance

109. Require all homeowners to contact B.C. 1 Call prior to digging on their property to avoid any damage to underground infrastructure.

Natural Disasters and Emergency Preparedness

110. Continue investing in prevention, mitigation, adaptation, response and recovery for wildfire, flood and climate-related natural disasters, while also protecting local fish and wildlife, as well as earthquake response and resiliency.

Social Services

Children and Families

111. Continue to invest in affordable, accessible and quality child care, including increasing spaces, providing direct subsidies, and investing in a “seamless day” model of before- and after-school child care.

112. Provide funding to the Ministries of Children and Family Development, and Health to reduce wait times and improve access to assessments, early intervention therapies, early childhood education, infant development programs, health and medical supports, in-home supports, and before- and after- school programs for children and youth with special needs and their families. [see also: Recommendation 96 in K-12 Education]

Community Social Services and Social Policy

See Recommendation 65 in Health Care regarding charitable and non-profit organizations.

113. Support the development of a comprehensive, outcome-focused social policy framework, including providing stable, multi-year funding to organizations providing community social services and addressing recruitment, retention and compensation challenges within the community services sector.
114. Increase the funding level to Community Living BC, including reviewing the funding provided to home share providers.

Poverty Reduction and Social Assistance

115. Review the framework for income and disability assistance to ensure equitability and appropriate consideration of individual circumstances, including reviewing the provision of rental supplements, indexing rates to cost of living, and examining earnings exemptions and earned income.
116. Invest in a comprehensive program for assistive devices and medical equipment for people with disabilities.
117. Continue to fund and support BC's poverty reduction strategy TogetherBC.

Youth

118. Improve the system of care to ensure it will allow youth to age out of care and transition into independence with the necessary financial, emotional, and physical supports including mental health support, counselling, family planning, Indigenous and other cultural practices; life skills; and job skills training.
119. In recognition of how COVID-19 has exacerbated mental health challenges, invest in wrap-around programs and services for vulnerable youth, including through organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club and Right to Play.

Transportation and Transit

Accessible Transportation

120. Increase and expand HandyDART services.

Active Transportation

121. Fully fund the provincial active transportation strategy, including ensuring an active transportation lens is applied to the development of transportation infrastructure.

Public Transit

122. Develop a recovery plan for BC's transit and transportation sector, with participation by all levels of government, that strengthens funding models and addresses transit gaps in rural and remote communities.
123. Prioritize accelerated deployment of electric buses, including the necessary charging infrastructure, where feasible throughout the province.
124. Work with local governments and transit authorities to explore new pricing mechanisms to help make public transit more accessible for youth and low-income families.

Appendix A: Survey Results

Question 1

The B.C. government is committed to making life more affordable, delivering the services people count on and building a resilient, sustainable economy. What are your top three priorities to help make life better for you and your community as we come through COVID-19? (3,583 responses)

The response option to this question was open-ended. All responses were reviewed and coded by theme.

Anti-racism, policing and reconciliation were the most common themes in responses to this question with a focus on Indigenous rights and structural discrimination. Respondents identified a number of areas for action, including: re-allocating policing budgets to social services, education, mental health support, and affordable housing; and reforming and providing better de-escalation training for police interactions. Respondents also emphasized the importance of fulfilling obligations under the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by focusing efforts on reconciliation, including providing better supports for urban Indigenous peoples and communities. Individuals also expressed support for including anti-racism and anti-discrimination frameworks into many aspects of society, including education, government, and policing.

Social services was the second most common theme in response to this question. Respondents advocated for a continuation of income assistance to seniors, students, and those who have lost their income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as more financial support for people living with disabilities. Improvements to labour practices was also highlighted with respondents referencing initiatives such as the implementation of a livable income, allowing workers to continue working from home, a reduced work week, improved safety standards, a continuation of hazard pay for essential employees during the pandemic, and paid sick leave. Other responses included support for a universal basic income, poverty reduction, funding for community organizations, and access to affordable child care.

The third most common theme was housing. Respondents focused on the need for additional investments in affordable housing for purchase and for rent and for homelessness.

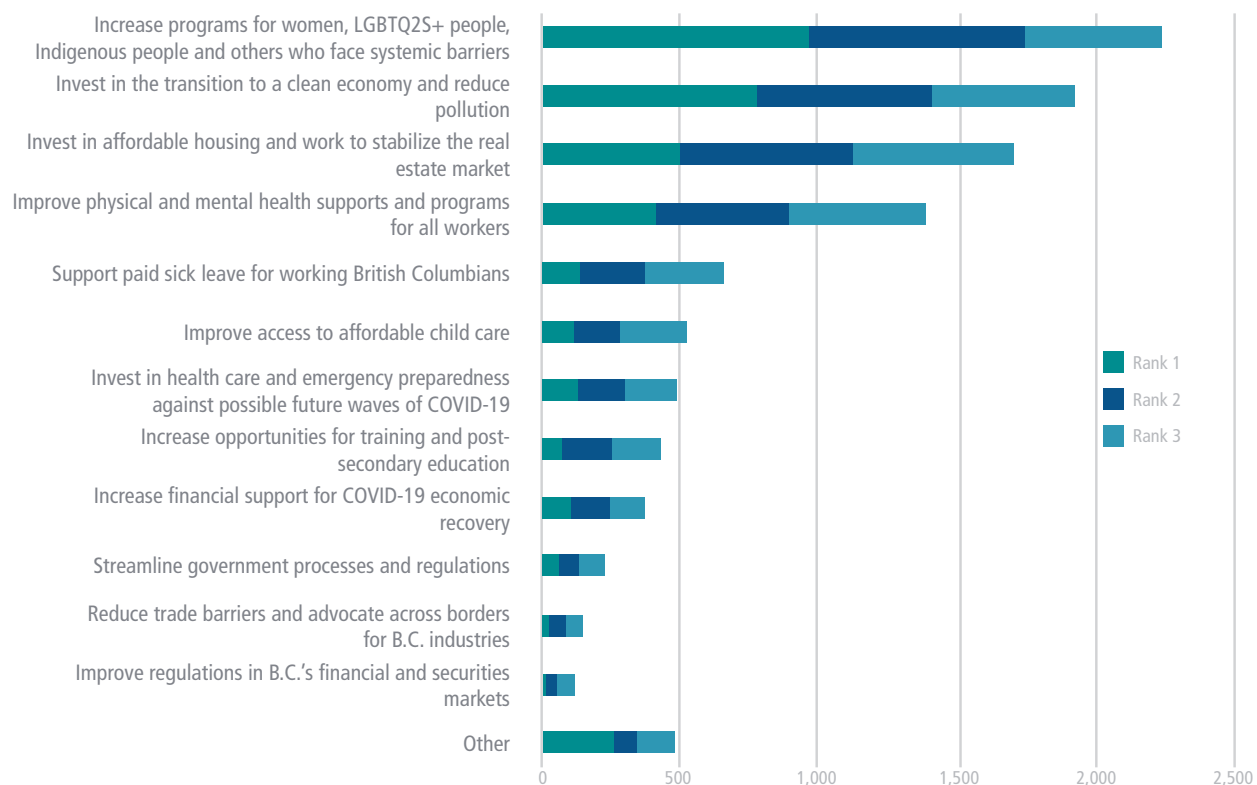
Health care was the next most common theme with improvements to seniors' and long-term care homes a key focus. Respondents also recommended more comprehensive health care coverage, comprised of dental care, prescription coverage, and preventative medicine. Others requested more funding for mental health and addictions services and supported the decriminalization of drugs. Shorter wait times to see a doctor, improved access to health care services, and an increase in the number of health care workers, especially in rural areas, were also identified as areas for action. There were also a number of responses specific to increasing awareness and support for myalgic encephalomyelitis.

The environment was identified as the fifth most common theme. Specifically, respondents were interested in stronger environmental protections, especially the preservation of old growth forests. Improved funding to the fight against climate change was also identified as a key priority with respondents suggesting investments in developing a green economy and furthering developing green spaces such as public parks.

Other themes included: funding for K-12 education and schools as well as funding and financial supports for post-secondary education; and economic relief for small businesses.

Question 2

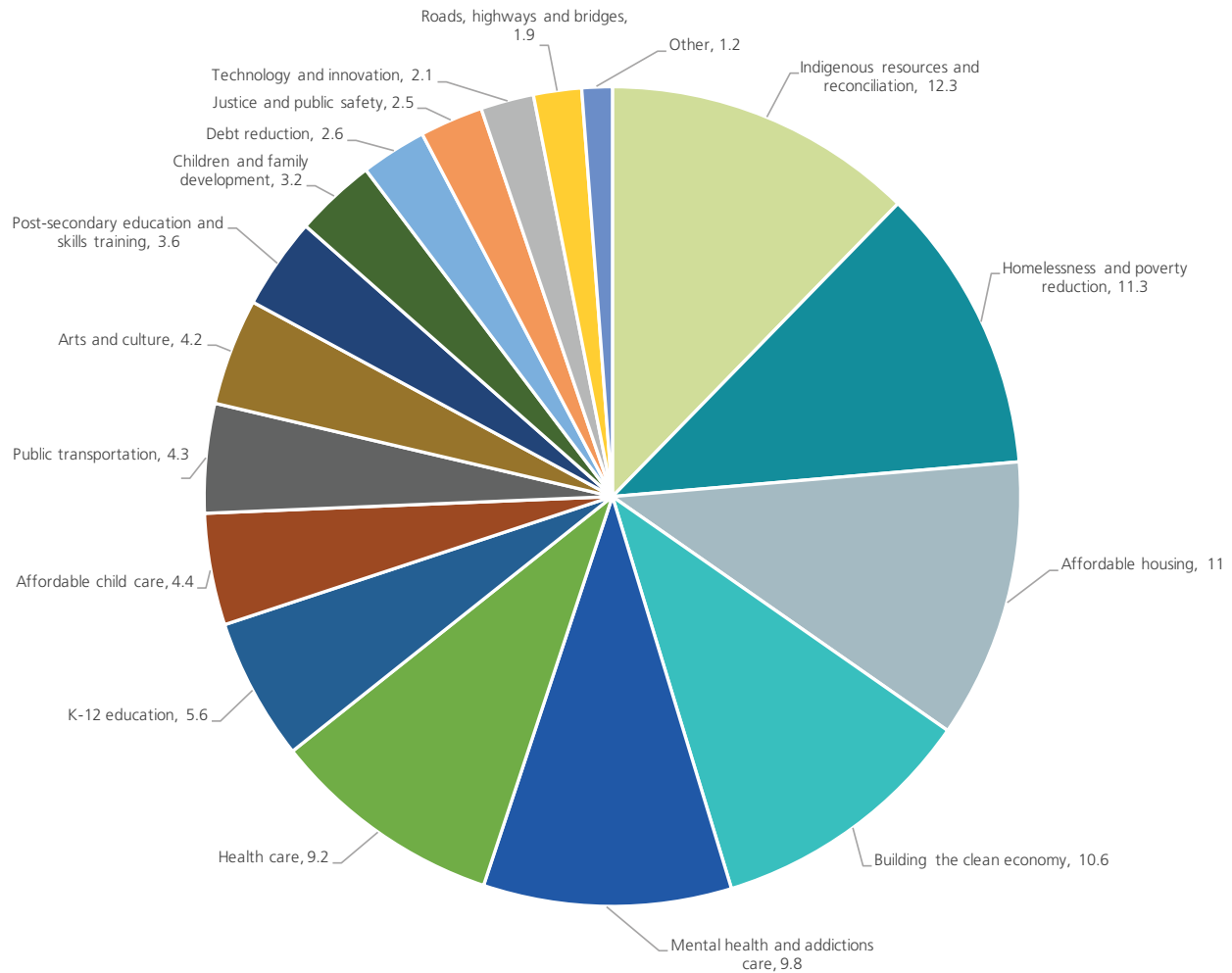
Aside from the immediate need to keep people healthy and safe through the COVID-19 pandemic, what actions should government prioritize to help strengthen B.C.'s economy? Please rank your top three choices (3,567 responses)



In the “other” category, the most common response was reallocating funds away from policing and towards community programs such as social services, education, health care, and environmental protection. A number of respondents also suggested addressing systemic and structural inequities and implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Other respondents advocated for increasing income assistance for students, seniors, families, people with disabilities, and those who have lost their employment due to COVID-19, and adequately addressing climate change and protect the environment, specifically by ending the logging of old growth forests

Question 3

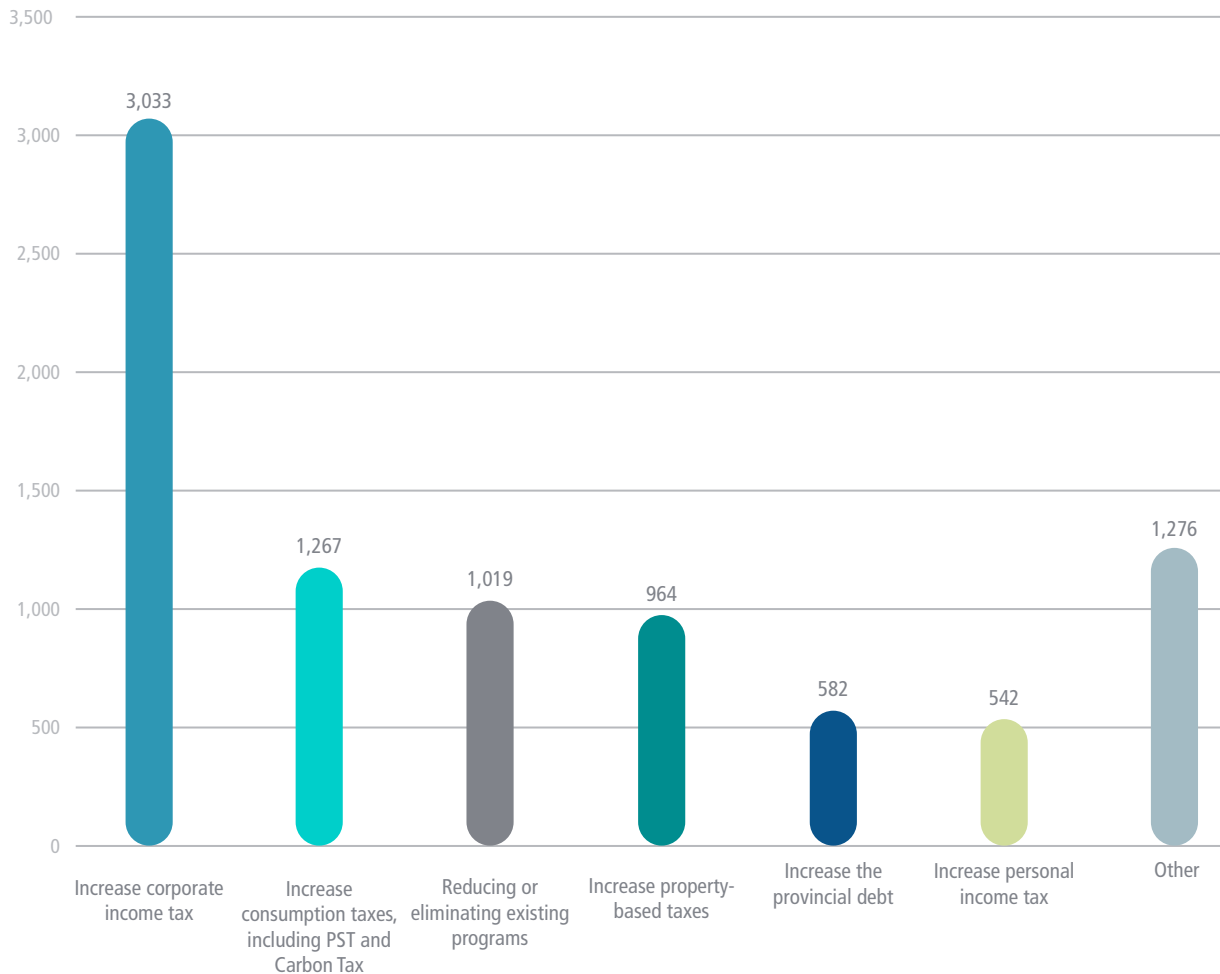
If you had one dollar to put toward programs and services across government, how would you choose to divide it? (3,566 responses)



In the "other" category, environmental protection and conservation, including the protection of old growth forests, was the most common response. Respondents also recommended creating more green spaces in BC such as parks, investing in more active transportation, reallocating police budgets, and increasing, and increased support for people with disabilities.

Question 4

Given the ongoing demand for government programs, supports and services, how would you like to see your government continue to pay for them? (3,599 responses)



Note: More than one selection was permitted for this question.

Approximately one-third of respondents to this question opted to complete the “other” category. The most common suggestion was reallocating funding from policing efforts to pay for proposed other programs and services. Second was support for increased taxation on the wealthy. Other suggestions included less government spending, reducing red tape, and reduced government salaries.

Question 5

Please identify your region. (3,312 responses)

