



# News Release

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## For Immediate Release

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### **Representative calls on government to urgently provide supports for children and youth with disabilities**

VICTORIA – Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth has released a new report entitled *Still Left Out: Children and youth with disabilities in B.C.*, calling on the provincial government to immediately provide much-needed supports for the children and youth with disabilities and their families across British Columbia who are currently under-served.

In 2020, RCY released *Left Out*, a report examining how families of young people with disabilities were coping in the midst of a global pandemic. That report showed that children and families had been struggling long before the pandemic hit. The report told the stories of several families throughout B.C. and found that the supports and services they desperately needed simply weren't there. In the report, Charlesworth urges immediate action from government to support children and youth with special needs (CYSN) and their families.

Now, three years later, RCY followed up with those 10 families as well as the four families who participated in our 2021 *Excluded* report, to determine what, if anything, had changed or improved for them in the past three years.

“The short answer is, unfortunately, not much,” Charlesworth said. “Families of children with disabilities in B.C. are still struggling with a system of supports and services that is fragmented, under-resourced and filled with barriers that make it incredibly difficult for parents and caregivers to access the services they need for their children.”

For the *Still Left Out* report, RCY also conducted an anonymous survey for families and caregivers of children with disabilities across the province. Almost three-quarters of the more than 1,000 respondents – from every region in B.C. – reported feeling “no confidence” or “minimal confidence” that their child would receive the services they need, whether in or out of school, within the next one to three years.

“Every child deserves the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their unique needs,” said Angela Clancy, Executive Director with the Family Support Institute of BC. “The time to act and provide the much-needed support for these families is now. A few years' delay can be a young person's entire childhood. We cannot let these children and their families continue to be left out. Immediate action is not just necessary; it is a moral imperative. This report strongly echoes the urgent calls that the Family Support Institute receives from families in desperate need, waiting for the essential services their loved ones require.”

Since the release of *Left Out* and *Excluded*, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) has been in the midst of re-imagining its CYSN framework but, because of the significant

delays, many children with disabilities and their families continue to be under-served or not served at all. While the Representative supports the government's vision of a community-based system that is based on functional needs rather than being diagnosis-driven, children and families who remain left out need immediate action.

"These children need supports now, not a few years from now" Charlesworth said. "While I understand and support the efforts being made by MCFD to engage with families, young people and rights and title holders, it is vital that more be done sooner rather than later – especially for families and children who are waiting for some sort of lifeline to be sent their way."

Parents and caregivers told RCY that they are exhausted and overwhelmed with having to navigate a system of supports that appears set up to make it difficult to access basic supports for their children. They feel they are often up against processes that seem deliberate in denying or complicating their ability to access the supports their children need.

This report presents the stories of 14 families, combined with RCY's survey results organized into four broad age groups, which document how families are experiencing B.C.'s systems of support as their children transition from birth to young adulthood.

"These families are not asking for much," Charlesworth said. "They want what every parent and caregiver wants to give their children – a future where they can thrive and reach their full potential. The time to act and provide the much-needed support for these families is now."

The report urges government to move forward on immediate and medium-term actions to support CYSN families – especially those who are unserved or under-served – as was promised a year ago, and to make progress on recommendations that have been brought forward in past RCY reports.

The full report is available here: <https://rcybc.ca/?p=7939>

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