



# News Release

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DATE November 9, 2009  
SUBJECT Children with autism at risk

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## Children with autism at risk: Queen Alexandra lays off autism interventionists and behavioural therapists

Despite a province-wide protest by parents against the elimination of specialized treatment for severely autistic children, 43 therapists were issued lay-off notice Friday at Queen Alexandra Centre for Children on Vancouver Island. The therapists are members of the Health Sciences Association of BC, the union that represents 16,000 health science professionals including autism intervention specialists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, and social workers who work with autistic children and their families.

In September, the provincial government eliminated funding for Early Intensive Behaviour Intervention – cutting funding for severely autistic children by \$3 million.

“When a child is diagnosed with autism, it can seem devastating. Their family wants to do everything they can to give their child the intensive behavioural therapy support that is proven to help children with autism flourish as they grow and develop,” said HSA President Reid Johnson.

“The elimination of this program is short-sighted. A child who has had the benefit of intensive therapy will need far fewer costly medical or mental health interventions and social assistance later in life,” he said.

“The staff at Queen Alexandra are devastated. Their own future is uncertain, and they are extremely concerned about the children and families who have been left without the treatment they need to give their kids a fighting chance,” Johnson said.

He said the cuts to services for autistic children are just one in a continuing attack on services for children with special needs.

“The government has also cut funding for the coordinating and training offices for infant development, Aboriginal infant development, supported child development, and Aboriginal supported child development. These are programs for the most vulnerable children in BC,” he said.

“HSA will continue to work with families to fight this attack on the most vulnerable children in our province,” Johnson said.

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