



Families First? Shortsighted government underfunding means thousands of special-needs children awaiting therapy

January 15, 2013

For immediate release: January 15, 2013

British Columbians were dismayed to learn from a CBC Go Public report this week that families with autistic children are having to wait as long as two and a half years for crucial speech language therapy.

Click [here](#) to read CBCs Go Public Report: -Child who doesn't speak waits 2½ years for therapy"

Therapists who provide the assessments and therapy have been speaking out for years.

Reid Johnson is President of the Health Sciences Association, the union representing speech language therapists, autism behavioural intervention specialists, and other highly-trained therapists whose expertise assists special-needs children.

-Therapy programs across BC are doing the best they can, but they are often under-resourced," he said. -As therapists, we know that study after study has emphasized the importance of treating special-needs kids as early as possible: the younger the child, the more capacity they have to respond to effective treatment and therapy, and grow up to live a full, independent life."

Therapy waiting list: Not just kids diagnosed with autism

-Kids diagnosed with autism need immediate and intensive therapy. But its not just children with autism who are waiting for therapy," he said. -Thousands of children have just as much need for treatment, and they are sitting on wait lists while their optimal window for treatment gets smaller and smaller."

-Every time a newly diagnosed child has to be put on a wait list, its heartbreaking for the family and for the therapists," he said. -We know that just in the Tri-Cities area of Metro Vancouver, there are 446 pre-school aged children who are waiting for therapy. Thats just Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody ... and only looking at kids 5 years old or younger, who already have been assessed and diagnosed. How many thousands are waiting all across BC?"

Johnson said advocates for special-needs children in BC have been calling on the provincial government to stop cutting treatment funds and establish adequate resources for therapy and support.

-In 2009, the BC government cut \$3 million from treatment funds for special needs kids, resulting in the elimination of one of the best early intensive behavioural intervention programs in the country ... at Queen Alexandra Centre for Children on Vancouver Island."

Page 1 of 2

Click [here](#) to review article -Provincial government eliminates autism intervention program"

-Children who dont receive timely therapy experience life-long suffering. Put in financial terms, the current best estimate for life-long supports for untreated kids with autism is \$2 million per child. 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.

-In recent years, 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.

-30-

A speech language therapist from a Lower Mainland therapy program is available to media.

For information, contact:

Yukie Kurahashi 604.439.0994 (x526) / 1.800.663.2017 (x526)

ykurahashi@hsabc.org

[Printer-friendly Version](#)

Type:

[Media Release](#)

Topic:

[Issues, Campaigns and Government Relations](#)

- [Print](#)
- [PDF](#)

180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017