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April 20, 2022

Health care features in B.C. pandemic budget

The BC government today released the first full provincial budget of the current pandemic crisis.

As expected, the priorities are aimed squarely at pandemic support for the immediate term and economic recovery for the longer term. There is significant new investment in public infrastructure, health care, programs to benefit vulnerable British Columbians, and ongoing support for business sectors hit hard over the last year.

Fiscal year 2020-2021 is expected to end with a deficit of \$8.1 billion, increasing to \$9.6 billion for 2021-2022. Provincial debt load is projected to increase, but debt to GDP ratio remains manageable at 23%.

Here are some of the highlights:

Health care

- An additional \$2.6 billion in base budget funding for health care for 2021-2022. Health Authorities will see an increase of \$1.3 billion from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022 – an increase of 8%.
- \$253 million over three years to expand primary and urgent care to increase access to doctors and nurse practitioners.
- \$300m over three years to address growing demand for cancer care, PharmaCare and services under MSP.
- \$495 million over three years to continue to fund the successful strategy to reduce diagnostic imaging and surgery backlogs exacerbated by the pandemic.
- \$585 million over three years for the Health Career Access Program that will recruit, train, and employ up to 3,000 new care aides in long-term care and assisted living
- \$45 million over three years in new funding to help address systemic Indigenous racism in the health care system through training and education

Health human resources and shortages

- \$96 million in new funding over three years to support expansion of post-secondary training capacity for health science professionals and nurses. This funding will begin to help address long-standing and severe shortages of key health science professionals.



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Mental Health

- \$500 million over three years for 12 new Foundry youth mental health centres and other mental health and substance use services.
- \$15 million for overdose prevention and \$51 million for opioid use disorder treatment in 2021-2022.
- \$97 million to provide targeted mental health supports for children, youth and young for early diagnosis, intervention and supports. Funding will support the Mental Health in Schools program, as well as expand the number of integrated child and youth teams from five to 20 teams across B.C. by 2023-2024.

Capital infrastructure investments

- Capital infrastructure spending – including hospitals, long-term care homes, schools, rental housing and post-secondary institutions – is budgeted to increase from \$6.3 billion in 2020-2021 to \$8.5 billion in 2021-2022.
- Capital spending on infrastructure in the health sector will total \$7.8 billion over the next three years. The investments will support new major construction projects and upgrading of health facilities, medical and diagnostic equipment and technology systems.

Child care and early childhood development

- \$111 million over three years 3,750 new low-cost child care spaces throughout the province through 75 additional ChildcareBC Universal Prototype Sites.
- Doubling the number of \$10-a-day child care spaces, doubling the wage enhancement for early childhood educators
- Ministry of Children and Family Development budget will increase by \$169 million, including \$31 million for services for the Children and Youth with Special Needs foundational programs through 2021-2022.

“We welcome these new investments, and the increase in funding for training seats for health science professions experiencing severe shortage is particularly important,” said HSA President Val Avery. In the coming months, the union will be working closely with the provincial government to help shape and direct this money where it is needed most.

“Budgets often don’t contain everything we were hoping for, and HSA is disappointed there is no commitment to paid sick leave for workers in BC. The pandemic has shown us that paid sick leave is essential to ensure people are able follow public health orders without putting themselves or their families in financial peril.”



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There were also no increases in the budget for the Ministry of Labour. “We had been looking for increased investment to better fund enforcement of the Employment Standards Act and bring online an expanded mental health presumptive coverage program for a health care and community social service workers,” noted Avery.

“We will continue to work with our allies in the labour movement and community organizations to advocate for these and other programs that will help British Columbians across the province.”

Budget resources:

You can find the full Budget 2021 package here: <https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2021/default.htm>

You can read the reaction of the BC Federation of Labour here: <https://bcfed.ca/news/releases/bcfed-welcomes-new-investments-health-care-caring-services-and-infrastructure>

You can read the reaction of the BC Health Coalition here: <https://bchealthcoalition.ca/news/2021-04-bc-budget-continues-crucial-investment-health-care-services>