

## Social Policy Framework Q&A

### **What is social policy?**

Social policy is about what makes a province or a community the kind of place where people want to live. It is about the things that affect the quality of day-to-day life. How do we come together to meet human needs like housing, education, jobs, education, health, safety and caring for children? How do we care for and about one another? What is important to us when we think about these things? A social policy is the course of action a government takes in relation to the health and well being of its citizens.

### **What is a social policy framework?**

A framework is like a road map or blueprint, providing a structure around ideas and directions. Policy frameworks are tools that can guide decision making, set future direction, identify important connections, and support the alignment of policies and practices both inside and outside an organization

### **Why do we need a social policy framework in B.C.?**

There are many individuals, community organizations and government ministries doing good work related to the health and well being of British Columbians. The provincial government plays a vital role in bringing British Columbians together to develop an overarching framework that is broad enough to deal with our most pressing social challenges.

The economic prosperity of British Columbia relies on people who are thriving and able to contribute to their communities. Strong social structures from early education, to affordable housing, to reduced crime, to food security, to employment, and timely health care are necessary for a vital and competitive province. Many of these structures are linked and a social policy framework can identify these connections, align policies and practices and potentially save money for government.

Long-term planning, along with innovative thinking can increase the effectiveness and efficiency of services for citizens.

We all benefit when citizens, government and businesses come together to agree on a vision in which all British Columbians can participate in and contribute to a vibrant province.

### **How do we get a SPF?**

Since matters of social policy fall under provincial jurisdiction, the province needs to take leadership in the development and implementation of a social policy framework. Board Voice believes that such a framework would only be successful if it reflects the values and ideas of British Columbians and for that reason, suggests the need for a broad consultation process throughout the development.

At this point, Board Voice as well as numerous municipalities and organizations are generating discussions around the province about the need for and value of a framework.

### **Who would need to be involved in the development of a SPF?**

Finding ways to engage the citizens of British Columbia in such dialogues is crucial. Clearly all of the social ministries would need to be involved, including Health, Education, Children and Family Development, Social Development and Social Innovation, Justice, Community, Sport and Cultural Development and Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation. Provincial organizations, such as Board Voice, community agencies, municipalities, community foundations, associations and boards of trade would be called on to both assist the government in planning and input via consultation processes.

### **What's in it for government?**

This would represent a substantial accomplishment for any government – one with long-term, positive impact on the people of this province.

A review of various major government initiatives over the years indicate that government could get better outcomes for the money, if a guiding framework of ideas, goals and expectations were at the heart of decision-making. It is a long range, aspirational document that is specifically geared to drive change, throughout government and the various bodies that government funds.

Priorities would be set and mechanisms developed to drive integrated approaches to complex issues. Senior executives would be measured on their capacities to manage horizontally across ministries, as well as vertically within their own ministry.

### **What's in it for municipalities?**

Social issues are very evident at the community level, but municipalities have the neither the resources nor the mandate for managing these. Local politicians are supportive of an overarching framework that would clearly set out roles, goals and priorities at a provincial level and focus resources more effectively on complex issues.

A case could be made for municipalities to have a greater capacity for service planning and management, but at the least they want a coherent understanding about what the support systems are supposed to be accomplishing and a process by which to review the results on a regular basis.

### **What's in it for communities?**

Communities will be the great beneficiaries of a well-conceived and executed social policy framework as people will experience their communities as safer, more supportive and more inclusive. The benefits flowing from a more rationalized system of services and supports and the opportunity to contribute to this process at a local level are not calculable at this point, but should be significant.

### **What's in it for the community social-benefit sector?**

The role of the sector in communities would be clarified and the work they accomplish, better understood. The framework would likely lead to some rationalizing of services, which should be based on a community plan developed by each community.

The not for profit sector has been struggling for years with ineffective community planning, problematic procurement processes, low wages and constrained funding and would benefit from a coherent plan going forward. Those initiatives developed under the Government/Non-Profit Initiative could be

subsumed under this framework. A SPF would demand greater collaboration at the community level and better ways to deliver services across organizational and ministry boundaries.

### **What's in it for the citizens of British Columbia?**

People would be able to find services when they need them. The day to day life of British Columbians improves when we get the right services at the right time. All British Columbians would have the opportunity to become productive and engaged to the best of their abilities.

### **Is a SPF just another way to ask for more funding?**

A social policy framework is not a budget document and does not commit government to any budget numbers. It's important that these two processes not be confused.

### **Is a SPF a plan or a budget?**

A SPF is a plan at the highest level, but shouldn't be confused with an annual ministry service plan or workplan. It is a high level document with a scope of 10 to 20 years. Budget planning would take the SFP priorities into account in determining allocations, but this would occur within normal budgeting processes. A SPF could eventually alter that way that existing funding is allocated.

### **What would the elements of a plan be?**

Much of this will be determined through consultation with the people of the province; however, one would expect a visionary statement, a set of principles, some high-level, aspirational goals, some discussion of various roles and expectations, some sense of the how transparency will be achieved and results reported on and possibly, what mechanisms will drive the framework within government.

### **How would it work?**

There are many possibilities for managing a SPF. Commitment and support from the highest level of the provincial government will help to determine success. Coordinating mechanisms in government and some capacity for community planning will be required. A system-wide steering committee representing various sectors, including the unions, might be a valuable construct.

Once a SPF has been developed and implemented, ministries would be required to jointly develop and manage plans and share accountability for outcomes on key priorities. Very likely, we will see a drive towards more cost-effective and earlier interventions and greater attention to the social determinants of health in priority setting.

Ministries will continue to operate their key portfolios within current structures, although more focussed attention and resourcing will be placed on the areas in which collaboration will be required.

### **What assurances would there be that such an endeavour would simply be put aside and never properly implemented?**

This process will only succeed if the government is committed to it. As with any major change initiative, perseverance and commitment will be required. With enough support from the people of the province in its construct, perhaps it could even survive a change in government.

To see how Alberta implemented a social policy framework go to:

<http://socialpolicyframework.alberta.ca/files/documents/ahs-nonannotatedfrmwrk-webfinal.pdf>

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