



**Presentation to the  
Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services  
September 26, 2013  
By Dr. Carol Matusicky, Chair of the Board Voice Society of B.C.**

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Good afternoon. My name is Carol Matusicky and I am Chair of the Board Voice Society of B.C. Our organization represents the boards of directors of social service agencies from across the province and we are a voice working to develop strong, vibrant communities supported by high quality social services. We have spoken to this committee in past years.

Recently, through a grant from the Vancouver Foundation, Board Voice has sponsored a number of inter-board community projects aimed at bringing these community volunteers together to consider the needs of their communities and promote collaboration between the agencies. These conversations have helped Board Voice better understand the issues facing our community agencies today and have stimulated ideas for improving the system.

Community social services cover a complex array of supports and services in our communities and they often fly under the radar of public consciousness. They include programs like day care and early childhood development; mental health and addictions; family support and child protection; assisted housing and employment; community corrections and specialized programs for women, children, youth and senior citizens. These programs operate throughout our communities – a web of caring without which our communities would be bleak indeed – not good for people and not good for business.

For the past decade community social services agencies have been under serious pressure and this situation continues today. The latest crunch has come through the Cooperative Gains process, which will see agencies

having to find a 3% salary increase (Salaries making up roughly 80% of the budget) within their current operating budgets. This is on top of numerous other cost downloads over the past several years. Apparently, school boards, with arguably much more room to maneuver, may not have to cover the costs related to increases for teachers.

We've witnessed a situation where health costs have risen by 34% over the decade, while social services have declined by 23% over the same time. Now we know from research that only 40% of health outcomes are due to the health system and that the rest comes from such factors as inclusion, community supports and income security. Moreover, research tells us that investing in community supports will offset many of the downstream costs currently involved in the courts, prisons and high-end medical services. It makes good financial sense to invest in community services.

A recent article in the Vancouver Sun beautifully articulates this issue. The article by Ian Mulgrew states that:

*Everyone agreed it was time we tackled the underlying causes of crime. Unfortunately, the solutions entailed Victoria reversing most of its spending decisions and pumping millions into the social and health services instead of policing and corrections.*

He goes on to say:

*There is a solution: Stop treating people with health problems as criminals. Stop prosecuting addicts for petty offences and replace expensive cops and judges with a battalion of nurses and social workers.*

*Coupled with the massive decline in the crime rate, the removal of thousands of petty possession, breach and process charges from the court and corrections system should free lots of money for more treatment beds.*

*In the past two decades, we have not needed more cops and new processing systems such as the community court; we have needed sweeping legal reform, a better safety net and much more money for mental health services.*

Another example comes from a 2012 report by the TD Bank about the value of early childhood education. It stated that: For every dollar that

governments spend on early childhood education, the economic return to society down the line ranges between \$1.50 and \$3. And "the benefit ratio for disadvantaged children [is] in the double digits." That is a huge return on investment.

In April of this year, the Roundtable of Provincial Social Service Organizations sponsored a public opinion poll to determine how community services are understood in B.C. The poll suggests that as in previous polls, there is a high degree of support for community social services. More than 53% of the respondents even suggested that higher taxes would be appropriate to enhance services.

Board Voice recognizes that the government is in a constraint mode due to projected revenue shortfalls and will not likely be investing heavily over the next year. However, we would like to offer a small investment proposal to government which could have substantial impact for the future and that is to begin a provincial dialogue leading to a social policy framework for the province. This is an approach successfully undertaken in a number of other jurisdictions (including Alberta, Nova Scotia, London and Vancouver for example).

A Social Policy Framework would describe the kind of province in which we want to live, learn, work and play. It would guide decision making, set future direction, identify important connections, and support the alignment of policies and practices. All social ministries would be a part of this (e.g. Health, Education, AG & Sol Gen, MCFD and MSD) and the broader public as well. Many existing initiatives, like the Government/Non Profit Initiative, the 10 Year Mental Health Plan and the B.C. Early Years Strategy would fit within the framework.

Currently in B.C. there is no overarching framework to guide the work of social ministries and related community organizations in the province. No all-embracing vision, goals, and accountabilities, which could assist in bringing innovative approaches to difficult to solve issues.

A framework would provide a clear vision and goals for social policy in B.C.

with expectations for stakeholders clearly laid out and a commitment to work collaboratively to achieve big social goals over time.

Driven from the top and informed through a consultation with B.C. citizens, a social policy framework would begin to bring about more horizontal planning and execution across all ministries and other key sectors.

We would like to urge the government to invest in a broad consultation process over the next year so that we will be better prepared to make strategic investments in future years guided by a framework of ideas and goals transparent to all.

In summary then:

Board Voice is asking that the government, in collaboration with Board Voice and other provincial organizations, commence a process for the development of a social policy framework for British Columbia.

We want to thank you for your attention today and look forward to working closely with you over the coming years to strengthen our communities and the services that nourish us all.

Thank you.

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## Briefing Note: A Social Policy Framework for B.C. September 2013

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### **Purpose:**

To provide a brief overview about the idea of a social policy framework for B.C.

### **Introduction:**

We have many exceptional supports for people in the province of B.C. We are lucky to have some excellent schools and universities, good hospitals and medical staff, and outstanding community agencies providing services and supports from cradle to grave. We also have some complex and difficult social issues that will require a more comprehensive and integrated approach to resolve. For example, British Columbia has the highest rate of poverty in all of Canada and is tied for the highest rate of child poverty with Manitoba.

We can do better. And a social policy framework is an approach to make this happen.

### **Definition:**

**Social policy** focuses on the issues and responses that affect the quality of life and welfare of individuals. In doing so, social policy efforts often seek to protect or promote the material well-being of individuals, families, or groups on the grounds of equality, compassion or justice. Because of this, social policy is tied to economic policy.

Social policy is about the values, strategies, plans, and actions that most directly affect people—individually and in their relationships and networks with their friends, families, and communities. (From Weaving the Threads – Nova Scotia)

**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. In short, policy frameworks are blueprints for something we want to build and roadmaps for where we want to go. (From the Alberta Social Planning Framework)

## **Why a Social Policy Framework for B.C.?**

### **The Problem**

- Currently in B.C. there is no overarching framework to guide the work of social ministries and related community organizations in the province. No all-embracing vision, goals, and accountabilities, which could assist in bringing new approaches to difficult to solve issues.
- While collaboration is recognized as critically important to ensure the best and most efficient use of resources, there are few mechanisms either at a provincial or community level to bring this about.
- Broad ministry plans, which drive change, are often not linked and most ministries continue to operate largely in silos.
- At a community level, there are few planning mechanisms that bring organizations together within their sector or across sector boundaries. Those that do exist are often spotty, ad hoc and not institutionalized. Few resources exist to support this type of work within agency or municipal budgets.
- Linkages between social policies and economic policies are difficult to discern, although upon reflection, are obvious and need to be understood and managed.
- The issues that affect individuals and families are not easily dealt with in silos: issues of employment, housing, health care, child protection, day care, food security, and disability supports for example, are generally linked and require solutions that are linked horizontally at all levels to be effective.
- Time consuming and expensive organizational restructurings rarely accomplish the level of collaboration and integration they set out to resolve.

### **A Solution**

- A social policy framework could begin to drive the change necessary to bring about better policy coherence and better social outcomes through the creation of a shared vision and goals, integrated plans, clarified roles and responsibilities and clear expectations and accountabilities.
- Recently six Deputy Ministers were required to develop a joint action plan to address issues for persons with developmental disabilities. The plan recognized that people do not live in silos and require integrated solutions. A social policy framework would institutionalize an approach that would make this the norm rather than an exception.
- A social policy framework developed through extensive provincial consultation would help to build understanding of the linked nature of social issues and the

role of different stakeholders in making things better.

- In times of tight budgets, a framework could help to develop provincial priorities and integrated plans to address them and help to streamline delivery mechanisms.
- Existing plans, such as the Healthy Minds, Healthy People, A Ten Year Plan to Address Mental Health and Substance Use in British Columbia; the B.C. Early Years Strategy; and White Paper, Part One: A Modern, Transparent Justice System and White Paper, Part Two: A Timely and Balanced Justice System would all be identified and included in the broad framework.
- The framework would be monitored by a steering committee of Deputy Ministers to ensure milestones were being addressed. All social policy would be reviewed through an integrated lens.
- Evidence based research on the social determinants of health could help to guide priority setting and decision-making.
- The nature of the partnership relationship between government and community agencies could be clarified and the potential for community planning and development exploited to better manage the system of supports to people.
- A policy framework could better balance investments in prevention and intervention.

### **An Approach to Development**

- Just as there are many different forms a social policy framework could take, there are many ways to get there.
- Board Voice advocates for a broad provincial consultation, undertaken by the provincial government, informed by a steering committee of key stakeholders.
- Resources will be required to undertake this initiative, although the intent would not be to create funding commitments for new programs in the development of the framework. New funding requirements, which could evolve from the framework, would be handled through the existing processes and within the resources and priorities of the government.