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## NEWS RELEASE

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Office of the Premier

**Premier Eby commits to maintaining individualized autism funding, engaging in deeper consultation for a new funding and service model for children and youth with support needs**

VICTORIA – Premier David Eby and Mitzi Dean, Minister of Children and Family Development, have met with representatives of the First Nations Leadership Council and AutismBC, as well as B.C.’s representative for children and youth to discuss improving services for children and youth with support needs.

At that meeting, they shared that government will maintain individualized funding for children with an autism diagnosis instead of phasing it out in 2025 as was announced in October 2021. Additionally, they committed to engaging in deeper consultation with parents and caregivers, First Nations, Indigenous Peoples, communities, experts and practitioners, and other stakeholders with lived experience to understand how the system can be transformed and together build a better system of supports, co-developed with Indigenous communities.

“Every child in B.C. should have the supports they need to thrive,” said Premier Eby. “We are focused on listening to families of children and youth with support needs. We will work collaboratively with all partners to make sure our services work for every child.”

Dean said: “Our focus is on ensuring children and youth have the supports they need to thrive. I look forward to working collaboratively with our partners to build a province where services are provided that meet the unique needs of all children and youth.”

The commitment made by Premier Eby and Dean includes the following elements:

- The maintenance of individualized funding for those with an autism diagnosis even after 2025, including those who are diagnosed in the future.
- An engagement process co-designed by First Nations leadership and leaders from the disability community, in partnership with government.
- A pause on the rollout of B.C.’s plan to establish a network of family connection centres, with the exception of the four pilots to be launched. The four pilots will be evaluated during the process.
- New investments in the interim, as the new system is being developed to support children with disabilities and support needs that are currently underserved, including fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (known as FASD), Down syndrome and other neuro-cognitive developmental disabilities.

Cheryl Casimir, First Nations Summit political executive, said: “I applaud Premier Eby for this decision to change course. This decision shows that the Premier has listened, understood and provided leadership. This is a good day because it gives all an opportunity to transform the system in a way that supports all children with all disabilities.”

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, secretary-treasurer, Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, said: “We agree with the Province that the system has to be transformed for all children with disabilities. This an important step forward. Having a proper evidence-based process, respecting the free, prior and informed consent of First Nations, consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and maintaining and supplementing existing funding, now allows us to move forward jointly to build a service model that will actually work.”

Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations, said: “Services for children with disabilities must be rights-based and evidence-based. For First Nations children, this means that they are being supported in culturally safe and informed ways, with their families and communities fully involved, and through laws, policies and practices that are designed and implemented in ways that respect the jurisdiction of their Nation. Such a rights-based and evidence-based system has never existed in British Columbia. Today's announcement - finally - gives us the opportunity to get it right. Now we need to get to work together, in the right way, and make the future better for all children with disabilities.”

Julia Boyle, executive director, AutismBC, said: “Many families will be incredibly relieved to know they can keep their direct autism funding and the service providers that support their autistic children. We thank the premier for listening to these families and respecting this choice. Much more work needs to be done to better serve the families and children that are left behind in the current Children and Youth with Support Needs framework. We look forward to doing this work together.”

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