Building a Better British Columbia and a Stronger BC Liberal Party

Our Priorities, Our Plan
Leaders must be responsible. If BC Liberals are to once again earn the trust of British Columbians and return to government after the next election, then we must demonstrate responsibility.

For me, that means not making promises that, as an opposition party, we can’t keep. It means being honest and upfront about our priorities, and it all starts by listening.

The priorities outlined here for our Party and British Columbia are built from the conversations I’ve had with you and your neighbours. It’s a realistic and straightforward vision of where we can go together and the steps we must take to get there.

When I put my name forward in this leadership race, I made it clear I wanted to listen to you. I’ve visited every corner of our province and talked with British Columbians, including existing party members and those who have just joined us.

Based on the conversations I’ve had, I know that British Columbians want to have a real say in their future, as well as a pragmatic, responsible roadmap from the BC Liberal Party.

My roadmap is based on accountability and setting priorities. It’s a work in progress, because moving forward and working together is what a political party does. It starts by setting priorities, then working with a team to achieve ambitious goals. For me, that’s the hallmark of true leadership.

As free enterprisers, we believe in balanced budgets, surpluses, a strong economy, and triple A credit ratings. But, those pillars must have a purpose. For me, that purpose is connecting with people, building livable communities, creating opportunities, and igniting hope for the future.

As you review the priorities I’ve set out, I hope you will see some of our conversations and discussions reflected in them. It will take the collective effort of many working towards a common goal to get our province back on track, but together I know we can make our province better and our Party stronger than ever before.

I hope you will join me.

Dianne Watts
AFFORDABILITY: MORE THAN JUST MAKING ENDS MEET

Affordability is a major problem for many British Columbians. All three levels of government need to remember that there is only one taxpayer, and that fact should always be at the forefront when developing policy. Like you, I believe it’s time for an honest discussion about what we can do to ensure the tax money government collects from each of us is used responsibly.

1. HOUSING

British Columbians believe we need to develop an innovative, long-term, province-wide framework that addresses housing affordability, and expands and increases housing options and supply in communities across the province.

I’m proposing the following five concrete steps to increase housing supply in British Columbia:

- Partner with the private sector and local governments on a new provincial task force to produce practical policy solutions that add more variety in housing stock, including student and senior housing, as well as identifying opportunities to assist municipalities with their development processes.
- Work with post-secondary institutions to use new and existing funding programs to provide incentives to increase housing options on campuses.
- Increase funding for community-based social and supportive housing initiatives that continue the work of BC Liberal governments to address homelessness and protect our province’s vulnerable residents.
- Develop a province-wide seniors housing strategy that gives elderly British Columbians the option of staying in their own homes longer, and expands subsidized care options.
- Align federal, provincial and local government housing initiatives, because working together is key to housing affordability.

2. ICBC

I have heard right across the province that British Columbians want relief from sharp increases in vehicle insurance. British Columbians are also concerned that government has been transferring excess equity (profit) from ICBC, thereby removing its ability to keep premiums low.

- When it comes to providing British Columbians with affordable car insurance, we need to look at every option – including best practices from other jurisdictions.
- Any ICBC profits should be used to reduce insurance rates, and should not be paid to government as a dividend.

3. BC HYDRO

Like ICBC, British Columbians are clear: they want and deserve transparency in how government is using Crown corporation revenues.

- Using funds from Crown corporations to balance provincial budgets must stop. Profits from Crown corporations should be used to reduce costs to customers.

4. BC FERRIES

BC Ferries is part of our highway system. It must be more efficient, more affordable, and part of our province’s economic success story.

- Seniors rates should apply every day of the year.
- The number of reservation spaces on each sailing should be increased.
- Create a discounted frequent traveller reward system.

5. TAXATION

Balanced budgets, surpluses, a strong economy, and triple-A credit ratings are at the heart of our free enterprise party. But, these economic fundamentals must have a practical purpose: they must make life better for you and your family.

- British Columbia must have the most competitive tax system in the country to encourage the expansion of our diverse economy and create jobs in all regions of the province.
- Government should be creating the environment for British Columbia’s small businesses to thrive and expand by reducing red tape and ensuring low tax rates.

Affordability is an issue for BC families right across the province. From the availability of affordable housing, to the cost of insuring your vehicle, or paying your monthly utility bills, the cost of living is something we talk about each and every day.
Even though the recent BC Liberal record on the economy is strong, it doesn’t mean we can’t do even better in the future.

As I met with British Columbians, I heard about the need for our economy to function as one whole unit instead of a series of silos for different sectors. I couldn’t agree more.

In short, this plan for British Columbia’s economy is rooted in your priorities, the sorts of things you talked about when I visited communities across the province. Like you, I believe that when British Columbians work together to move our whole province forward, there’s no limit to what we can accomplish.

I also believe that a significant portion of budget surpluses from a strong economy must be reinvested back into our communities. We must strengthen our working relationship with local government to identify gaps and support communities across every region of this province.

It’s the job of the provincial government to take a bird’s eye view of our whole economy and make decisions that allow every industry to thrive and grow.

- Government’s free enterprise economic strategy must see our economy as a whole, and continue to diversify across the province.
- Government must work with industry sectors, communities and local governments to ensure that each plays a role in building our prosperity.
- We must give creative entrepreneurs, local businesses, and province-wide industry sectors the political stability, the regulatory framework, and the opportunity to succeed in BC.

Rural British Columbia and resource communities play an important part in our economic future. Too often, rural and smaller communities feel their government hasn’t been listening, or that their resource-based industries are taken for granted. That must change.

- Our economic success must be province-wide, with every region of BC playing its part and having the opportunity to succeed and prosper.
- We need to close the “604 and 250” divide with an economy that’s built by every corner of the province, and benefits British Columbians wherever they work and live.
- The responsible development of BC’s natural resources is essential to our economy, and critical to communities across the province.
- Today, resource development — whether it’s mining, forestry, or oil and gas — is a technology industry. We need to expand technology opportunities across our resource sectors.
- Encouraging a more diverse economy includes creation of Economic Investment Zones in rural and small communities to spur growth, development and job creation.
- Our province’s full potential can only be reached by an economy that actively includes our First Nations, and is inclusive, respectful, and fosters a spirit of entrepreneurship and cooperation.
TOMORROW’S TECHNOLOGY TODAY: OUR TECH FUTURE AND BC’S ECONOMY

Every region of this province should have the opportunity to expand our thriving tech sector. Technology is not limited to those living in urban centres. There are examples of incredible innovation right across our province.

To successfully compete, British Columbia must be a world leader in embracing and developing new technologies that help grow our economy, right across the province.

The signs of the tech sector’s success are evident everywhere, and BC Liberal governments have been a big part of the industry’s growth.

Our universities, colleges, research centres and technical schools give us plenty of ongoing potential. But, an even greater advantage is the quality of our people. Some of the greatest tech minds in the world call British Columbia home, and every year we welcome hundreds more.

We owe it to ourselves, and to our children, to make sure we’re making the most of our opportunities.

- Work aggressively with the private sector and local governments to expand innovation centres and research hubs, and not limit them to major urban centres.
- Continue developing and expanding partnerships between the tech sector and industry, academia, and government.
- Support incubator hubs with opportunities to test and commercialize technologies and products.
- Give BC students in every grade the training, the tools and the access they need to be a part of the world’s growing tech sector.

The Energy to Get it Done

We need to build on, and update, our BC Energy Plan.

- That’s why part of our economic master plan includes the connectivity between the development of our resources and the energy sector.
- BC needs a comprehensive energy strategy that looks 10, 30 and 50 years into the future, and incorporates LNG, oil and gas, hydroelectric, wind, solar, and other renewables.
- We need to engage stakeholders, local and indigenous communities, academia, environmentalists, and the business community in the development of this plan.
We must do more to support British Columbia farmers as they continue to embrace innovation and technology as they compete with the best at home and abroad. Their award-winning products and crops have won BC international recognition, and their round-the-clock work ethic is a reputation that’s well-earned every single day.

Our agricultural community is an invaluable asset to our province, and we need to listen to them as they look to the future.

Of course, no conversation about our natural resources and economy is complete without taking the time to recognize the ongoing issues facing the forest sector in our province.

In communities across the province, I heard about the challenges facing our forest sector, forest communities, and the thousands of families who work in this important industry.

Forest fires, trade disputes, American protectionism, and problems with fibre supply have all contributed to recent struggles.

- The forest sector needs a long-term, comprehensive provincial plan that anticipates and addresses regional, provincial, national and international issues, and contains a plan to protect jobs and support workers.
- BC’s forest sector ranks among the best and most innovative in the world, and I want to keep it that way.

GROWING BC’S FOREST SECTOR: RENEWABLE PROSPERITY

The NDP believe our forest sector is a sunset industry. I believe it’s a technology industry, and that the world wants and needs BC forest products, a renewable resource that continues to build this province and its communities.

SUPPORTING OUR FARMERS AND THE AGRICULTURE COMMUNITY

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- We need to ensure agricultural practices reflect the right balance between the ongoing needs and priorities of our farmers, modern agriculture, crop production, access to water, and the broader community.
- Farmers across British Columbia have told me the high cost of energy is a serious problem for them. We should explore options for rebate programs for farmers in our coldest regions, as well as initiatives that incent farmers to increase energy efficiency in their local operations.

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In a province the size of ours, good transportation is an absolute necessity. Whether it’s needing to move goods quickly, or getting people out of gridlock, we need real solutions now. From one corner of this province to the other, I’ve heard loud and clear that transportation issues are a significant challenge and growing burden for families, businesses and local communities. When people and goods are at a standstill, so is the economy.

Our province needs a transportation system that works for everyone. Too often, federal, provincial and local priorities are not aligned, or create needless extra layers of approvals and bureaucracy. In short, the system isn’t working as well as it should.

We must always look at transportation through a long-term lens to ensure we’re making the right investments for British Columbians today and in the future.

- We need a long-term, province-wide transportation strategy that incorporates growth, demographic changes, regional planning, prioritization of projects, and innovative financing options that generate a high quality of life for all British Columbians.
- Identify and prioritize crucial transportation needs across all regions of British Columbia, such as replacing the Taylor Bridge between Dawson Creek and Fort St. John; widening Highway 1 in the Fraser Valley; establishing cell service along rural highways across BC, including Highway 16; completing the four-laning of the Cariboo Connector; prioritizing new interchanges on Vancouver Island; alleviating congestion on the North Shore; and expanding rapid transit options in the Lower Mainland.
- Re-instate year-round senior’s discounts on BC Ferries.
- Provide additional funding for BC’s highway maintenance programs to ensure proper winter maintenance to make our highways safer for all British Columbians.
- Identify opportunities for expansion of British Columbia’s ports outside of the Lower Mainland, including inland ports such as Prince George and Ashcroft.

Finally, a master plan needs to be developed in conjunction with all three levels of government to find efficiencies, streamline transportation and infrastructure projects, and plan multi-year investments.
THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Protecting our environment is part of who we are as British Columbians. Our priority must be to have a healthy environment, while ensuring our economy is strong and growing. I believe we can have both.

- We need to strike the right balance between our strong environmental commitments and our economic goals by eliminating overlap and redundancy in our current environmental policies.
- Once a project or sector meets BC’s stringent environmental standards, and gets project approval to proceed, we’re not going back to square one and starting all over again.

In British Columbia, we’re fortunate to have many new and dynamic job-creating industries, including tourism, and film and digital production. These industries have thrived, in part, because government put in place the economic conditions for them to succeed.

The time has come to put that same successful approach to work on behalf of our British Columbia cideries, craft breweries, distilleries and wineries. They are succeeding for one simple reason: their products are among the best in the world. But, government overreach and pointless inter-provincial trade barriers are holding them back from realizing their potential.

- We need to champion our craft breweries, distilleries, cideries and wineries, and push for free trade between the provinces.
- Get BC wine, craft beer and ciders on our grocery shelves.
- Implement an aggressive new agri-tourism strategy, the kind that has benefited communities from Cape Town to California. Let’s show the world how to enjoy great BC scenery and products.

VANCOUVER ISLAND: OPTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

By virtue of its geography, history, and growing population — nearly 800,000 — Vancouver Island is a unique economic engine that is home to a growing number of industry sectors, including natural resources, technology, tourism, agriculture and manufacturing.

As an island, it counts on a strong transportation system, and no discussion of an economic master plan for BC would be complete without a serious discussion about Vancouver Island.

- I’m committed to working directly with communities, stakeholders and local governments to develop a “Made on Vancouver Island” strategy dealing with issues around economic opportunities, transportation, forestry, tourism and recreation, and technology and innovation.

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VANCOUVER ISLAND: OPTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES
Portables are no substitute for real schools. But, they have become more and more common in British Columbia as a solution to school overcrowding. This does not foster the proper learning environment for children. The solution is simple: build more schools.

- Our children need to be educated in proper classrooms. It’s a core responsibility of government to ensure that they are. We need to build schools for young British Columbians.
- Complete the seismic upgrades needed on schools throughout the province. Seismic concerns are real, and we cannot afford to risk delaying these important safety upgrades.
- We must put an end to building schools only once a neighbourhood is fully built out. The provincial government should work in tandem with local community planning processes so that schools are ready and built by the time families are moving into the area – not after.
- We also need to work with our colleges and universities to make sure space is available for all British Columbia students who want to attend post-secondary institutions, and meet the necessary entrance requirements.

In today’s world, students learn as much outside of the classroom as they do in it. Still, we’ve been slow to reinvent our public school system so that our children learn from the world outside their classroom.

- It’s time to embrace learning that happens in and out of the classroom. We must examine best practices around the world, with a view to revamping the school experience for BC students. The clock is ticking, and a world that’s changing faster than ever is already here. Giving schools, students, educators and parents what they need to excel in the 21st century is our number one educational priority.

The research is clear; the earlier students begin to learn in controlled, play-based settings, the more successful they will be over the long term. Additionally, students who are taught literacy skills at an early age outperform those who don’t start reading until later.

- I want to make sure every child has a chance to get ahead. That means prioritizing a province-wide expansion of early childhood learning and literacy programs. It’s an important investment in our collective future.

Education must be a top priority, where we work with parents, teachers and the broader community to build an education system for the 21st century.
When it comes to healthcare in British Columbia, we need to embrace innovation and put it to work even more than we’re doing today.

We need to emphasize wellness and healthy living. And, we need to come to terms with our aging population, changing demographics, and the realities of smaller and rural communities who need and deserve modern medicine, hospitals, clinics and treatment centres.

In short, we need to ensure we have a healthcare system that works when people need it.

Bringing together medical technology, research and health professionals at Surrey’s Innovation Boulevard, reinforced my belief that innovation and technology are critical to any successful healthcare system, and are a major solution to growing costs and patient needs.

We need to take immediate steps to ease the doctor shortage facing so many British Columbia families.

We will introduce new programs to attract medical professionals. Considerations for new programs include:

1. Targeted student debt relief for medical professionals.
2. A wider range of practice options for doctors, including collaborative and stand-alone models.
3. Relocation assistance for doctors coming from out-of-province, and an updated and reformed foreign credential recognition system.
4. New administrative reforms, and billing options that make British Columbia more attractive to doctors.
5. Incentivize the use of Nurse Practitioners in rural and small communities that need immediate access to additional healthcare resources.

Out-of-control wait times are another ongoing challenge for our healthcare system. Too many British Columbians spend too long waiting for the care they need.

To address wait times, I will establish a “Wait Time Reduction Task Force” made up of government, healthcare professionals, patients, and the tech sector to bring forward recommendations that use innovation and technology to reduce wait times.
A full review must be undertaken of healthcare capital and infrastructure needs in both rapidly growing areas and rural communities alike. With the results of the review, a long-term plan for healthcare needs to be mapped out.

At the end of the day, if we believe more money is the only solution to healthcare issues, we will never succeed, or solve its problems.

To help support efforts to keep seniors in their homes and to make sure their contributions to our local communities are not lost, I will support the development of Community Health Hubs across British Columbia.

What is a Community Health Hub?

Community Health Hubs provide a strong link between local primary care services and the broad, existing network of social services that support our fellow British Columbians, particularly seniors.

Community Health Hubs are guided by a local volunteer Advisory Committee to ensure the Hub’s programs and initiatives are in keeping with broader community goals. In this way, Community Health Hubs are unique because the leadership and direction come from the local community. It’s an innovative way to offer seniors the support they need while keeping them rooted in the communities they call home.

British Columbia seniors deserve a government that recognizes the contributions they’ve made to our province, and understands the important role they can continue to play in our future.

Seniors enrich our local communities. They work, volunteer, mentor and participate in community events and traditions.

Of course, seniors are not always able to stay in their homes as long as they would like. Illness, injury, and the effects of aging often mean elderly British Columbians need professional, full-time care. When that happens, government’s priority must be to ensure seniors receive high quality care.

However, in British Columbia the care seniors receive in government-managed environments seems to vary from region to region, and even facility to facility.

Every care home — government or non-government — should meet the minimum provincial standard of 3.36 direct care hours per senior, per day.

Palliative care options and expansions should be available, and should reflect the outcomes of the National Framework for Palliative Care upon its completion in December 2018.

Our priority is to ensure that British Columbia seniors see themselves reflected in all aspects of our province’s society, and when the time comes, the care they need will always be there.
Mental illness, addictions and the opioid crisis form one of the great healthcare challenges of our time. We need to ensure the healthcare system is appropriately resourced to support those struggling with mental illness and addictions. This is particularly true when it comes to the family, as well as the individual.

Increased spending alone will not solve this crisis. We need to innovate and embrace best practices from around the world if we are to truly reform mental healthcare and addiction services.

That’s why I’m proposing the development of Therapeutic Communities, Specialized Treatment Precincts, Detox and Sobering Centres and Community Recovery Centers, all to support people in an environment that meets their unique needs.

Mental illness is becoming more prevalent among children and young people. Early detection and intervention is key. In communities across our province, I heard firsthand from parents and teachers who have had to face the challenges that come with trying to support a young person suffering from mental illness.

In too many cases, parents and teachers feel abandoned by an overworked system lacking the resources needed to help them. Worse, they are often unprepared to offer the kind of support needed, and worry the young people they’re trying help could fall through the cracks in the system. We can’t let that happen.

We need to ensure parents and teachers have the tools they need to support those suffering from mental illness. This includes increasing access to mental health resources in schools.

What is a Therapeutic Community?

Therapeutic Communities introduce group-based supports and resources to those suffering from mental illnesses and drug addiction over the long term. Clients and therapists live together in a group home environment. In other models, day units are made available.

Participants spend time together participating in psychotherapy exercises and everyday practical activities. In other parts of the world, including Britain and the United States, Therapeutic Communities have earned widespread acclaim for their success. With British Columbia on the frontlines of the opioid crisis and our mental health system being stretched to the max, Therapeutic Communities offer an innovative tried-and-tested solution to protect the ones we love.

Partnerships are a key component as we deal with these very difficult issues. Our province has everything it takes to not only combat mental illness and addictions here at home, but also to lead on the world stage and share our solutions with everyone who needs help.

We will embrace innovation and technology to improve outcomes for those suffering from mental illness and addictions. One of our top priorities is to expand partnerships with universities and research centres in our province and to invest in cutting-edge research so we can learn more about how to prevent and treat mental illness here at home, and share our knowledge across the world.

Across British Columbia many local communities and municipal governments are challenged by the important issue of funding police resources. Too many gaps exist in policing resources and there is too much variance from community to community. It’s time for a new approach.

We need to create a provincial matrix for police resourcing and funding options that also incorporates best practices that can be shared by communities across the province.

Whether it is the ongoing opioid crisis, last year’s devastating forest fires, or meeting the everyday needs of the community, first responders are always there for us when we need them.

We need to increase supports and training for first responders.

Facilitate better integration between fire and ambulance units.

Increase assistance and support to British Columbia’s search and rescue teams.

STANDING UP FOR THOSE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS AND ADDICTIONS, AND THEIR FAMILIES

SUPPORTING FIRST RESPONDERS
Right across the province, I heard from BC Liberals who know that our Party must transform and earn the trust of British Columbians if we are going to form government again. Like any organization looking to remain relevant, we have to change and adapt.

A STRONGER, MORE DEMOCRATIC BC LIBERAL PARTY

We have to learn from our mistakes, and we have to feel comfortable challenging the status quo. If we’re afraid to tackle sensitive subjects, and learn from our mistakes, then I doubt we’ll be ready to win the next election.

In this leadership race, BC Liberals are not only interested in what kind of Premier a candidate might be. They also want to know about how the BC Liberal Party will govern and manage its own affairs under each potential leader.

Here are my five priorities for our Party.

1. Defeat the Referendum on Proportional Representation: Every Region Needs a Voice

British Columbians must come together to stop the NDP/Green coalition’s efforts to change our electoral system. If proportional representation becomes a reality, smaller communities across British Columbia will lose their voice. However, the referendum represents a tremendous opportunity for the BC Liberals. It will be our first chance to actively engage with British Columbians across our province with a new Leader and a new vision. That vision must start with ensuring British Columbians are fairly represented in all regions of this province.


We need to modernize and work with experts across the country on how to increase individual contributions and incorporate monthly giving, online giving, and relationship-based fundraising. We will introduce a fundraising plan for the BC Liberals that builds personal relationships with individual donors. This will enable us to become more connected as a Party, and improve our financial standing at the same time.
3. 24/7 Recruitment: Keeping the Membership Momentum Going

Political parties depend on the support of their members. The more members a Party has, the stronger it is. Over the past three months we have added over 30,000 new members to our Party and we need to keep the momentum going. I am committed to working directly with BC Liberal members to learn what our Party can do to better engage and bring members directly into the decision-making process as we set the new direction for the BC Liberal Party. Our Party must reflect the diversity of British Columbia, and it is our job to ensure that everyone feels connected to the Party and that it is meaningful and relevant in their lives.

4. Meaningful Policy Development: It’s Your Party, You Should have a Say

We need a special committee of Party members to review the BC Liberal policy process. I will create this committee to consider all aspects of policy development and report back with recommendations on how the process can be made stronger and more meaningful. I believe in a grassroots BC Liberal Party where policy is set from the bottom-up, not the top-down. This simple, but important, point-of-view will guide how I approach the policy process every day.

5. Increase our Digital Footprint: Putting Technology to Work for Our Party

In today’s world, political campaigns are using social media more than ever. To be competitive, the BC Liberal Party must rethink its approach to digital campaigning and how we interact with voters. We need to attract the best and brightest minds our province has to offer to help us develop and engage new digital strategies for the 21st century.
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