

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services Written Submission Template

This template is provided as a guide to individuals and organizations making a submission to the annual budget consultation. Please adapt as needed for your submission.

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You may also submit an alternative format for your submission, such as a video or audio file.

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Metro Vancouver Alliance (MVA) is an alliance of over faith, labour, community and education civil society organizations who work together for the common good. Our membership now exceeds 750,000 people across the province.

Our membership has identified 4 common priorities that are putting pressure on our everyday lives - affordable housing, accessible and affordable public transit, community healthcare and a comprehensive poverty reduction plan. These are the issues that we brought to John Horgan on April 4, 2016 at an assembly of 800 delegates representing our larger membership. This submission is in follow up to the commitments made that night to MVA alongside Andrew Weaver in the presence of 800 civil society leaders.

On May 3rd, 2018, we met with Minister James about the 2018 provincial budget and how it related to the commitments made by John Horgan at the MVA Provincial Election Leaders Accountability Assembly. We saw a strong move in the right direction, with work to do for the 2019 Budget. On October 11, 2019 we presented the following priorities to Minister James at a follow-up assembly. Our agenda has been nurtured, negotiated, and agreed to by thousands of MVA members. The members of the Alliance have chosen 5 vital issues facing our community and province. We have developed proposals in response which will make a genuine difference in the lives of the people of BC. We received commitments on these proposals and we are here to ensure our proposals are included in the provincial budget.

Recommendations

1. Affordable Non-Market Housing investment of \$3 billion
2. Tie rent to the unit not the tenant
3. Expansion of the BC Bus Pass to include children and low-income
4. 5% per year increase in HandyDART services

5. Accountable, Bold and Comprehensive Poverty Reduction Plan
6. Globally funded Community Healthcare Clinic expansion of 20 clinics by 2020

Affordable Housing:

Housing affordability remains the number one issue for our members. John Horgan's commitment to MVA is to invest \$3 billion in 10,000 units of affordable appropriate housing, defined as less than 30% of income or equal to social assistance amounts over 4 years. We support the government's promise to invest \$7 billion in a varied portfolio of housing projects over the next 10 years. At this time it is unclear how much of this will be allotted for truly affordable, appropriate housing to the standard definition of less than 30% of household income or equal to social assistance. Appropriate housing solutions require a range of affordable options for families, indigenous communities, seniors and university campuses.

MVA leaders are in the process of mapping our resources as civil society organizations to connect organizations with disposable land with potential affordable housing projects. In April 2019, we will be leading a civic education event - a Civic Academy on Community Land Trusts (CLTs). We would like to explore how we could partner with the Housing Hub to maximize the impact this land to establish CLTs as part of the affordable housing solution.

We were pleased to see the action taken on the recommendation of the Taskforce on Housing led by Spencer Chandra-Herbert to stop the previously allowed additional 2% rent increase added to inflation. We urge the government to take this one step further and tie the rent to the unit not the tenant. MVA members and partners agree that this is the best way to have an impact on BC's affordability crisis. We are ready and willing to publicly support this step as civil society leaders.

We would like to know how we can work together to find additional revenue sources to build affordable housing beyond the current "speculation" tax on empty homes.

Accessible Public Transportation

Civil society organizations depend on seniors and seniors depend on civil society organizations. It is of utmost importance that anyone with mobility challenges has access to safe and reliable transportation to work, participate in community life, access medical care and avoid social isolation.

As we all know, HandyDart is an essential service in our communities. While the majority of users are over 65, HandyDART serves people of all ages. Any one of us – even young able-bodied people – could need HandyDART next year. For the people who rely on HandyDART services, freedom of movement is at the mercy of those who fund and direct our public transit agencies. When these services are underfunded, all of us suffer. Failing to increase the amount of high-quality door-to-door custom transit service imposes substantial costs on the economy, on the public health system, and on family caregivers. It infringes on the rights of people living with disabilities. We believe public transit must be a higher priority for the provincial government. We need to improve all forms of transit to create healthier, more livable communities and to address the climate crisis.

Combined with the provincial government commitment to make BC the most accessible province in Canada by 2024, we are asking that the provincial government come through on this commitment for increased HandyDART service funding.

The population of people over 70 years old will continue to increase rapidly in BC over the next decade. There is already a chronic shortage of HandyDART service resulting in social isolation, missed medical appointments and other negative effects.

In listening to our members, we have heard hundreds of stories illustrating how taxis are ill-equipped to drive the population served by HandyDART. Prioritizing other customers, delayed or missed pick-ups, unfamiliarity with wheelchairs and mobility aids have left our members in unsafe situations for hours at a time. We have heard stories of missing a family member's memorial service, countless medical appointments, and even one's own birthday party. The costs of medical services on missed appointments, and the impact on social isolation more than justify this 5% increase per year for the next 4 years.

John Horgan's commitment to MVA:

- Provide funding through a special grant to increase HandyDART service hours by 5% per year for the next four years, 2018–2021, for all TransLink and BC Transit HandyDART services. The funding for TransLink would be in addition to the service increases in 2018 and 2019 already supported through municipal property taxes.

Our alliance will continue to work with the government to ensure HandyDART will receive this increase in provincial funding in 2019 and the following years.

We commit to:

- Providing the Premier, ministers, and provincial government staff with political support, testimony, and case studies to bolster their funding decisions on HandyDART services

Affordable Transportation

BC has the highest child poverty rate in Canada. Eliminating transit fares for children is one way to help reduce the impact of child poverty but also as a solution to make life more affordable for all British Columbians. Many of our members told us that paying fares for their children imposed a significant financial burden for them. Many mothers end up walking their children a great distance to school, because they can't afford transit fare and school buses are not available for many schools. Their children are often late for school and embarrassed in front of their peers and teachers. Children also need to be transported to the doctor and other services. Some of our members told us they missed doctor's appointments because they couldn't afford transit fares, and ending up being visited by social services because they missed the appointment. Youth in care have been disproportionately impacted by fare evasion tickets acquired when they had no other options for movement around the city. Transit tickets follow youth into the future and result in not being able to get a drivers license, limiting future job opportunities. The ability to take children and youth by bus on outings to parks and other recreational facilities reduces social isolation. Some of our members told us they were no longer able to afford to do that after the cancellation of the Sunday family pass.

For children, many of these services -- going to school, going to the doctor -- are mandatory and considered human rights. Access to transportation is an important part of being able to access these services as well as being able to fully participate in community and religious organizations. We heard from several members that they were unable to attend community events or church services because it could cost \$20 or more to pay for family transportation to and from their community centre or place of worship. Not only does this have a negative impact on the social determinants for these families, it also has a negative impact on the other members of their community and congregations. Our civil society organizations depend on the next cohort of families and children to participate. Without civil society organizations, we are left on our own, isolated and vulnerable, unable to live out our values in our communities. This pressure could easily be alleviated with the implementation of the following proposals.

We have provided estimated costs based on our research with TransLink planners over the last 2 years.

Summary Proposal 1: Free Transit for Children

Objective: To provide affordable access to transit for children and families.

Proposal:

- Free transit for children under 12 - \$7-9 million annual cost estimate
- 50% fare discount for children 12-18 on stored value and cash fares and monthly passes - \$40 million annual cost estimate

Proposal 2: Low Income Discount Passes

Objective: To provide a discounted pass to low income people who are not eligible for existing programs or discounts.

Cost Estimate:

Proposal:

- Three bands of low income fares based on LICO:
 - 85% - 115% LICO with a 50% discount
 - 50% - 85% LICO with a 65% discount
 - 50% and below LICO with a 95% discount
- Eligibility based on CRA Notice of Assessment or enrollment in an approved program
- Annual renewal
- Monthly passes only (ie, does not apply to single fares)
- People enrolled in the BC Bus Pass Program are ineligible
- Funding to come from provincial government
- Make low income pass visually identical to regular Compass cards

We commit to working with the BC government to fund these proposals as an expansion of the BC Bus Pass.

Poverty Reduction Plan

It is exciting to see the first steps of John Horgan's promise to MVA come to life with the introduction of the poverty reduction legislation committing the government to action. We hope to see a budget that reflects a bold and comprehensive plan that addresses the depth of poverty that too many members of our community are facing. Tying rent to the unit as part of this plan would mean that any increases in income or assistance rates would not immediately be transferred to landlords. We will celebrate when a well-funded, comprehensive and bold poverty reduction plan is announced in March 2019.

Community Health Care

John Horgan's committed to the expansion of 20 non-profit and community-governed Community Health Centres by 2020. In order to support a thriving CHC sector in BC, we need a global (block grant) funding stream tailored to the key attributes of CHCs where the composition of the team is based on the needs of the community, all team members are paid an appropriate salary and benefits, and required overhead costs are covered. A separate and dedicated funding stream will facilitate the development of community-governed, multi-disciplinary team-based care that is responsive to community needs and includes a strong focus on the determinants of health. It is important that a full range of roles essential to providing primary healthcare services and supports be included in the funding as eligible team members.

CHC expansion is part of the BC government's new primary care strategy announced in May 2018, and although CHC policy development and implementation planning is underway in the Ministry of Health, there is not yet a separate and dedicated funding stream for the CHC sector. We believe this may limit or undermine the potential expansion of this sector if there is no commitment for a guaranteed funding stream that will be distributed separately from the Primary Care Network planning process.