



StrongerBC

for everyone

GOOD LIVES IN STRONG COMMUNITIES
Investing in a bright future for rural communities





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Message from the Premier: Strong rural communities are the backbone of a stronger BC for everyone

Rural BC encompasses communities of all kinds – from places that can only be accessed by boat or floatplane, to larger regional hubs seeing remarkable growth. Like the diversity of rural communities, the people of rural BC themselves are diverse, unified by strength of character, unconditional support for neighbours, and appreciation for the natural beauty and bounty of our province.

Rural BC also has strong connections geographically, culturally and historically with First Nations governments and peoples. In smaller cities and on worksites across our province, Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members work side by side with mutual respect and an increasingly shared understanding of history. Relationships are changing now, in ways that are lifting all boats.

I saw the challenges and the gifts of rural life in our province when my family moved to Port McNeill in 2020 as a part of my wife Cailey's training to become a doctor. The closeness of the community, access to beautiful beaches and wild spaces, and the quiet – especially at night – made it easy to understand what draws people to, and keeps people in, smaller communities.

A city boy my whole life, I loved life in “McNeill,” and so did my family. Rural British Columbians are among some of the luckiest people on Earth to live where they do.

Rural life isn't easy though; everyone knows that living in more rural areas makes some aspects of life that city folks take for granted more challenging. That's why it's important for our provincial

government to ensure key services are delivered – whenever we can – in a way that makes life easier, and more enjoyable, in smaller centres.

To date, we've responded to these needs by making it a priority to bring the province together in three important ways: **digitally**, by connecting every single community in the province to high-speed internet and expanding highway cell coverage; **physically**, by investing in the roads, ferries, highways, transit, and small-craft harbours people need to get where they are going; and **administratively**, by making it possible for government workers to work everywhere in the province to serve the people who live everywhere in this province.

People in rural communities rightly count on access to strong and responsive public services. Whether it's being able to find child care and a good school for their kids, accessing top-notch health and mental-health care, benefiting from skills-training opportunities, or any other public service – people in smaller communities in B.C. deserve high-quality services designed for their local realities.

That's why we are strengthening services for everyone – while recognizing the unique needs of people in rural communities and modifying programs to be able to deliver for people in different kinds of communities across the province.

The landscape and size of our province means delivering services in smaller and more remote communities isn't easy work – it's complicated and requires the support of multiple levels of government. Having an MLA from a rural

constituency in charge of the province's finances helps make that work easier, and also helps ensure we can't lose track of the basic principle that our province can't succeed economically unless our rural communities are thriving.

Finance Minister Katrine Conroy has spent her life in rural B.C. – she understands first-hand how healthy rural communities drive opportunity for people throughout B.C. She shares our government's vision of a province where people have the same ability to build a good life in Trail and Burns Lake as they do in Victoria and Burnaby.

In addition to the support of a rural finance minister, I have also appointed two parliamentary secretaries from rural B.C. to provide leadership in areas where action is most critical to rural communities: Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health Jennifer Rice, and Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development Roly Russell. They are working with our rural caucus to ensure every government program considers and responds to the unique needs of rural community members.

There is a bright future ahead for all British Columbians, and that future needs to deliver prosperity and opportunity, not just in big cities, but also across every corner of the province. The good news is that technology and the global market's demands in the face of climate change mean that realizing this vision even in the remotest parts of B.C. is more possible than ever before.

Today, strong digital connections can unlock new economic opportunities in even the smallest and most remote communities – while preserving the size and character of places people love. We will be able to ensure high-speed internet access for all British Columbians.

Today, a new vision of partnership on the land with Indigenous Peoples is opening the door to global investment that sees our revitalized and renewed traditional industries as key to the solution of

climate change: renewable wood products, critical metals and minerals, and sustainable agricultural and fishing and tourism practices can and do provide good family-supporting jobs that are sustainable and secure over the long term.

We will be able to ensure economic success, growth and prosperity across the province, for all British Columbians.

Today, the bright future we all want is not only attainable – it's critical to unlocking opportunity for everyone in B.C.

If you're looking for people to help cut through the noise and get a job done, my bet will always be on the people who call rural B.C. home. They're some of the toughest, most hard-working and resourceful people I know. I'm proud to have so many rural British Columbians on our government team.

If there's one thing I've learned over the past few years, it's this: our province is stronger together. Going it alone won't work.

That's the way it's always been in rural B.C., with a neighbour ready to lend a hand.

There's a lot of work ahead of us – but we have five million plus neighbours ready to pitch in, brought together with this shared government strategy to get the work done.

Together we will build a stronger rural B.C., and in doing so, build a stronger province for everyone.



David Eby
Premier

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'DE', written in a cursive style.

Introduction

Rural, remote and Interior communities have always contributed mightily to the economy and prosperity of B.C. We know that when these communities thrive, it benefits the whole province – and puts us all on the path to a brighter future. That’s why it’s critical to strengthen rural and small communities and support people working to build a good life here.

As we face the challenges before us – drought, wildfires, atmospheric rivers that wash away our biggest highways – we can take comfort in one certainty. We’re all in this together. And we’re not leaving anyone behind.

The diversity of rural, Interior, coastal and First Nations communities is one of their greatest strengths and sources of opportunity. However, this diversity means they have different needs. What works for Prince George won’t necessarily work in Bella Bella.

Government recognizes that people in rural, Interior, northern, coastal and First Nations communities love where they live and don’t necessarily want drastic change. Any path to a brighter future for rural and remote communities must be deeply rooted in respect for place. Not all communities want to grow bigger – but all communities want and deserve to thrive.

To thrive, rural communities need to be connected to the larger global economy. Families need to be able to access information, services and audiences from home. Goods and people need to be able to move quickly, easily and affordably from rural B.C. to the rest of the world. And they need a government that includes them and reflects the perspectives

and expertise of people living in rural and remote communities.

Our vision starts with three steps to connect rural B.C. to a stronger future:

- delivering high-speed internet to every community in B.C.;
- helping goods and people move; and
- bringing rural expertise and perspectives to government.

While most of the challenges facing people in rural and remote communities are shared by people in other parts of B.C., often there are factors that make issues more acute in rural areas.

For example, climate change is affecting people in every part of B.C. But when people in Vancouver see wildfire smoke, more often than not – people in rural communities see fire. Both are challenging and scary, but having to evacuate one’s home and community to escape a fast-moving fire upends people’s entire lives.

That’s why it’s critical to apply a rural lens to the larger challenges facing the province and to bring good jobs in the public service back to rural communities. Because while people in B.C. share the same needs, and face many of the same difficulties, rural, remote and Interior communities often face unique challenges that make one-size-fits-all solutions unworkable.

Our vision for stronger rural communities is backed by actions government is taking to respond to the everyday pressures facing people in every part of the province, including targeted investments in

rural communities to address these provincewide priorities:

- better access to health care for you and your family;
- affordable housing in the community you call home;
- strong public services you can count on;
- building safer communities; and
- a cleaner, more secure future.

The economies of rural B.C. are as diverse as the landscapes that surround them.

However, many communities, especially smaller communities, rely heavily on a single industry or employer, and this makes them vulnerable to boom-and-bust cycles that are hard on families.

B.C. has experienced one of the fastest and strongest recoveries in the country coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our GDP growth has been a leader among the largest provinces for years, and despite global economic challenges on the horizon, we're in a strong position to take on whatever comes next.

As a whole, our economy is performing well, but not all families and communities are feeling the benefits equally. That's why government is working closely with First Nations, businesses and communities to strengthen and diversify rural economies.

Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples is a golden thread that runs throughout all of government's Actions and Investments in a bright future for rural, Interior, northern and coastal communities. Many of these Actions and Investments support the *Declaration Act Action Plan* – a cross-government action plan that guides our work to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in B.C.

Partnerships with First Nations and Indigenous organizations, showcasing Indigenous excellence in economic development, land-use management, housing and many other areas of the economy, have been critical to creating new economic opportunities in rural B.C. and will only be more important in the years to come.

Our investments in strong and diverse rural economies are concentrated in these areas:

- building a strong, skilled rural workforce;
- growing crops and the economy;
- revitalizing and renewing resource industries;
- developing world-class tourism experiences; and
- clean waters and abundant fisheries.

These actions reflect both the existing diversity of rural economies and also government's vision of a strong economic future for rural, Interior, coastal and First Nations communities. Diverse economies make a strong foundation for a secure future.

Together, the actions outlined in this document are a snapshot of the work government is doing to support rural, Interior, coastal and First Nations communities to build healthier, more diverse economies that are better connected to the rest of the province and the world. They are the foundation that underpins our vision of a bright future where people can build good lives in strong communities throughout B.C.

A stronger B.C. is one where people from every community can create a secure future. A province that's connected – where people from every region can access opportunity and pursue their dreams.

Because we're stronger together.



WHAT DOES “RURAL” MEAN IN B.C.?

The land we now call British Columbia covers over 944,000 square kilometres. It includes vast mountain ranges, 40,000 islands — including the biggest island on the west coast of the continent, winding fjords, desert hills, a vast Interior plateau, the Great Bear Rainforest, and countless other landscapes and special places.

B.C. covers a larger land area than France and Germany together. However, these two countries have a population of more than 150 million people combined, versus B.C. with a population of just over five million residents.

More than half of the people who live in B.C. live in Metro Vancouver, with an additional 10 per cent of the province’s population living in the Lower Mainland nearby. While communities on lower Vancouver Island don’t have an outsized population, they have strong links to Metro Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. With Victoria the seat of provincial government, these communities have historically had an outsized influence on shaping provincial policies.

Seventy-five per cent of the province is covered by mountains, leading to pockets of population spread across great distances of relative isolation. The vastness of the province, combined with its sparse and unevenly distributed population, leads to unique challenges for governance and service delivery that give a different shape to the word “rural” in B.C.

While communities such as Prince George, Nanaimo, Kelowna, Terrace, Williams Lake and Nelson don’t fit the traditional definition of “rural” due to their size, population density and services, they have a shared identity of being on the periphery of the concentrated economic and political power of the southwestern corner of the province. For the purposes of this document, the word “rural” is used with this context.

These shared factors don’t erase the massive differences between regional hub cities such as Kamloops and communities such as Klemtu, Mackenzie and Gitwinksihlkw. Small, remote and First Nations communities have unique factors that require the government to look through a rural lens and develop local approaches to program and service delivery.

Connecting rural BC to a stronger future

The path to a strong future for rural B.C. is paved with connections. Connections between people. Connections between communities. Connections between goods and markets. Connections to the global economy.

For too long, those connections were neglected. People many in rural and First Nations communities in B.C. were left out of opportunity and left to fend for themselves.

Over the past five years, government has been working hard to reverse that. We've made significant investments in roads, highways, ferries and transit to help goods and people get around. And we've made great strides toward our goal of connecting every community in B.C. with high-speed internet, improving cellphone service on provincial highways, and unlocking digital opportunity for everyone in B.C.

Finally, we're taking steps to better connect provincial policies to rural priorities by embracing distributed and remote work in the public service, so that people from rural and remote communities don't have to leave the places they love to contribute their knowledge, experience and rural lens to provincial policies and decisions.

Strengthening digital connections

In the 21st century, people need to be able to connect with services, audiences, businesses, markets and their government from home and in their communities – no matter where they live.

Increased digital connectivity is critical to opening up access to jobs, education, training and services for people in rural and remote communities.

In urban parts of B.C., access to high-speed internet services is largely taken for granted. Businesses know they can offer their customers a range of payment options, and they will work consistently. People know they can rely on connecting with services, education and opportunities online.

That's not the case in all rural communities right now, but we're on track to change that. Together with our federal partners, we are on an accelerated timeline to connect every community in the province to high-speed internet by 2027, giving every household in B.C. the opportunity to connect.

The economic benefits of connectivity for rural communities start at the construction phase and continue for decades beyond.

Two provincial studies – one looking at investments in northern connectivity and one examining the Kootenays – showed impressive returns to GDP for the local community and the province over the short-term as well as a 20-year period. They showed:

- just one dollar invested in new connectivity infrastructure in northern communities would generate seven times the return to GDP over 20 years; and
- in the Kootenays, a single dollar invested in connectivity infrastructure was estimated to generate \$14 in returns to GDP in the long term.

These estimates didn't include the full economic benefits of being able to access services, education and job opportunities, and the social and health benefits of enhanced connections with friends, family and audiences around the world.

Cellphone service is also critical for safety along highways. Access to cellphone service affects the safety of travelling on highways and changes how people live and do business. People in most parts of the province take it for granted that they can call 911 if they get in a collision and are injured or can call for help if their car needs repairs on the road, but that's just not possible on many stretches of B.C. highways today.

That's why improving cellular access on B.C. highways was a key element of 2020's StrongerBC recovery strategy and is something we are continuing to build on with an additional \$75 million to deliver connectivity to an additional 550 kilometres or more of B.C.'s rural highways by 2027.

Actions and Investments

- Delivering high-speed internet to every B.C. community by 2027 – a joint 50/50 federal-provincial commitment of \$830 million (\$415 million each).
- Expanding highway cellular services by a minimum of another 550 kilometres of highway by 2027 – a \$75 million investment.
- Budget 2023's investments in expanding cellphone service on highways builds on \$15 million invested as part of StrongerBC in 2020.
 - StrongerBC funding is delivering connectivity along 532 kilometres of highway and to 30 highway rest areas, ferry terminals and campgrounds, including 252 kilometres and two rest areas along the stretch of Highway 16 known as the Highway of Tears.

Helping goods and people move

Physical connections within and between communities are critical to the economic and social well-being of people in rural B.C.

Many rural communities are in areas with geography that makes getting around challenging. Long distances, narrow mountain passes, inland lakes and coastal waters all pose a challenge to moving goods and people. To support strong rural B.C. communities and economies, we are investing in transportation projects and programs that respond to these rural transportation realities.

Keeping ferries reliable and affordable, improving major highways, and repairing damage to critical infrastructure in the wake of natural disaster is an important part of making sure goods and people can move quickly and efficiently between communities.

The province has also been working hard to strengthen connections within communities by partnering with local governments to build active transportation infrastructure that makes it more pleasant for people to walk, roll and bike to and from the places where they live, work and play.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND RURAL TRANSPORTATION

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges to the physical connections between communities. This was made particularly clear when an atmospheric river washed out roads and bridges throughout the Interior in 2021.

Highway 1 through the Fraser Canyon, the Coquihalla, the Hope-Princeton and Highway 99 were all closed for weeks. Highway 8 from Merritt to Spences Bridge was all but destroyed, with more than 25 sections totalling more than seven kilometres of highway lost into the Nicola River.

With the exception of Highway 8, all these roads were reopened by mid-January 2022. The permanent rebuild of these roads, including additional measures to make them stronger and more resilient to climate change, will continue throughout 2023. Highway 8 opened in the fall of 2022 and rebuilding Highway 8 will continue well beyond 2023.

Actions and Investments

- The province has committed \$1.48 billion over the next three years to restore highway infrastructure and make it more resilient to weather extremes.

KICKING HORSE CANYON

The Kicking Horse Canyon, located just east of Golden, is one of the most geographically challenging sections of the Trans-Canada Highway. This critical corridor carries more than 10,000 vehicles daily during the summer, including many tourists. It's a key economic corridor with up to 30 per cent of the traffic on this highway consisting of commercial vehicles moving millions of dollars in goods.

Recognizing the importance of this transportation connection, government has been working hard to bring all of Highway 1 from Kamloops to the Alberta border up to a modern four-lane standard, with work on Kicking Horse Canyon set to complete in winter 2023-24.

Actions and Investments

- \$728 million over the next three years for upgrading Highway 1 between Kamloops and the Alberta border as part of Budget 2023.

UPGRADING AND MAINTAINING FOREST SERVICE ROADS

Forest service roads provide vital connections to rural British Columbia's land-based activities, including providing year-round access to First Nations communities. These communities require safe access to Forest Service Roads not only get to their residences, but for ambulances, school buses and food delivery services. These roads provide important access to hunting, fishing and camping and are a critical part of the wilderness tourism transportation network in rural communities, while also serving as important industrial corridors.

In some cases, like we have seen with the recent closure of Highway 97 in the Okanagan Shuswap area, ministry roads such as the 201 Forest Service Road and the Trout Creek Forest Service Road can provide critical evacuation routes and supply corridors when provincial highways have been cut off.

To support rural communities government is working to upgrade the condition and improve the maintenance of Forest Service Roads across the province.

Actions and Investments

- Budget 2023 provides an additional \$11.8 million in operating funding and \$4.5 million in capital funding to maintain and upgrade forest service roads.
 - This is in addition to \$28 million in funding provided as part of the StrongerBC economic recovery plan.

BC BUS NORTH

The loss of Greyhound service was particularly challenging for northern communities. To meet the need for long-haul bus service on northern routes, in June 2018 government and BC Transit launched BC Bus North, a long-haul bus service connecting communities such as Prince Rupert, Prince George, Valemount, Fort Nelson and points in between.

Since 2021, this service has been expanded to include an enhanced Northern Community Shuttle program that services dozens of additional rural and remote communities, including Dawson Creek, Chetwynd and the District of Stewart.

Actions and Investments

- Created B.C. Bus North, and together with the federal government, provided \$7.9 million to the Northern Development Initiative Trust to sustain and enhance northern transportation links, including an improved Northern Community Shuttle Program.
- Provided an additional \$5 million to the Northern Development Initiative Trust to continue BC Bus North and the Northern Community Shuttle Program until 2026-27.
- Contributed \$250,000 to the Northern Development Initiative Trust to help build a web-based platform for travel planning, reservations and customer service to help reduce barriers to travel in the North.
- Provided \$2.5 million to the three regional economic trusts (Northern Development Initiative Trust, Economic Trust of the Southern Interior, and Island-Coastal Economic Trust).
 - The trusts will use the funding to conduct regional engagement and analysis on rural, regional and inter-city passenger transportation and for other initiatives in support of passenger transportation.
 - The results of the engagement and analysis will help inform the development of transportation solutions that meet the needs of people in rural, Interior and coastal communities.

FERRIES

For coastal communities and communities in the Interior that rely on ferries, they are no less important than provincial highways. That's why government is committed to keeping Interior ferries free and coastal fares affordable, and is working hard to upgrade the ships and other infrastructure needed to run our ferry system reliably and efficiently.

Actions and Investments

- \$500 million in new funding for BC Ferries to maintain the affordability of coastal ferries and prevent large fare increases over the next four years.
- \$85 million in improvements to Kootenay Lake Ferry service, including a new electric-ready vessel and safety and amenity improvements at the Kootenay Bay and Balfour terminals.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Families in communities big and small benefit from active transportation infrastructure that makes it safer and more comfortable for people to go for walks, ride their bikes or get around with their mobility device.

People in every community deserve to feel safe and comfortable to walk, roll or cycle to where they want to go. Investing in active transportation is investing in affordable, livable and healthy communities – and putting us on the track to a cleaner future.

Actions and Investments

- Over the next three years, a \$100-million Active Transportation Capital Fund will help communities enhance and improve connections within existing active transportation networks and develop new ones.
- The B.C. Active Transportation Grant Program has provided \$60.5 million since 2019 to expand active transportation infrastructure in 213 communities throughout British Columbia.

Returning rural expertise to government

Building stronger connections between rural B.C. and government is just as important as connecting rural B.C. to the rest of the province digitally and physically.

To do that, government is embracing remote work in the public service so that people can stay in the rural communities they love while also contributing their expertise and rural lens to government.

Over the past few decades, policy jobs in the public service have largely been located in major urban centres, forcing people to leave communities they love to work for the public service.

Starting in 2023, ministries were instructed to make job opportunities available in any community where the ministry has office space unless prevented by operational requirements, allowing people from more communities to work for government.

The public service is continuing to develop policies that will fully leverage the benefits of remote and hybrid work. As this modernization continues, it will allow more people to pursue a career in public service without leaving the rural, Interior, coastal and First Nations communities they love.

In 2027, when every part of B.C. has high-speed digital connectivity, it will be possible to be part of the public service from rural communities across the province. Not only will this bring good-paying jobs to rural communities, it will help policies better reflect the lived experiences of people from different parts of the province.

Actions and Investments

- Embracing remote work in the public service, recruiting rural expertise and bringing good government jobs back to rural communities.
- Strengthening the representation and inclusion of Indigenous employees in the BC Public Service through the Where We All Belong diversity and inclusion strategy.

Shared priorities for a Stronger BC

People in rural communities share the same needs and priorities as people in the Lower Mainland and Greater Victoria. They need access to strong public services, good, affordable housing and high-quality health care. They want to live in communities that feel safe for them and their families. And they want to see a path to a safe and sustainable future.

Better access to health care for you and your family

We recognize that many rural and remote communities have distinct health-care challenges, particularly around transportation and access to services close to home. That's why government is taking action and tackling these issues with a vision to ensure everyone can get the health care they deserve regardless of where they live.

Health systems throughout Canada and in B.C. are facing significant challenges from long-standing systemic issues and human resource shortages, along with the added burdens caused by two public health emergencies – the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating impacts of overdoses caused by toxic drugs.

People across B.C. need timely access to a primary-care provider for advice, diagnostics and preventative care. They need their prescriptions. They need swift access to health care in

emergencies. They need access to teams of skilled health-care workers who can meet their needs. If they are facing a life-threatening diagnosis such as cancer, they need to know they can get timely, effective and high-quality health-care services.

In 2017, when government began work in earnest to improve health care in regional communities, regional hospitals in smaller hub cities such as Terrace and Dawson Creek were more than 55 years old and long overdue for replacement.

A hospital is not just a building. Delaying these investments reduced access to modern medical settings, had left communities with fewer hospital beds, and made it harder to attract surgical and other critical medical talent to these communities.

Government is taking action to reverse the effects of more than a decade and a half of delayed investments and neglect that took place prior to 2017 that has left many rural, northern and Interior communities without the health-care access they deserve.

The scale and scope of the work needed to address the health-care service challenges facing our province while also continuing to navigate two health crises, and an increasing demand for health-care services from a growing and aging population, means that we have a lot more work to do to meet the health-care needs of everyone in B.C.

HELPING PEOPLE CONNECT TO MEDICAL SERVICES

The size and landscape of the province can make it challenging to deliver health care in rural communities. Some medical procedures, such as cancer treatments and complex surgeries, are best delivered by specialists at dedicated medical centres that provide specialized care.

Recognizing that it's not always possible to provide specialized medical care in every community, the province is working to improve medical travel assistance so people can get the care they need.

Actions and Investments

- Expand the support for people in rural and remote areas who need to travel for cancer care through an initial investment of \$20 million to enhance medical travel programs provided by the Canadian Cancer Society and Hope Air.
 - Through this investment, more people will be able to travel and get cancer treatment in one of the six BC Cancer Centres or at one of the 41 Community Oncology Network sites throughout the province by helping cover travel-related costs, including transportation (via ferry, air or ground), accommodation, meals and other relevant expenses during treatment.
- In April 2023, reservation fees were eliminated for people travelling via the Travel Assistance Program, making BC Ferries cost-free for people travelling to access medical services.
- Providing enhanced travel-assistance services while work is underway to stabilize and improve medical services on northern Vancouver Island.
 - In February 2023, two custom seven-seat wheelchair-enabled shuttles were purchased to allow new daily shuttle transportation between Port Hardy and Port McNeill for patients and staff and to establish a health-connector service to Campbell River and Comox.
 - A third wheelchair-accessible shuttle van was added in March 2023.
- Supporting cost-free flights to Kelowna for non-emergency medical services for people in East Kootenay communities in partnership with Angel Flight East Kootenay.

NEW AND UPGRADED RURAL HOSPITALS AND HEALTH FACILITIES

High-quality health-care facilities are critical for people in all regions of the province.

For more than a decade and a half before 2017, construction of new and upgraded health facilities stalled throughout much of the province despite many rural hospitals and health facilities dating back to the 1960s or earlier.

Since 2017, government has accelerated the construction of new, expanded and upgraded health-care facilities throughout the province to better support skilled medical professionals in delivering the best medical care to people in B.C. Building new and upgraded hospitals and health facilities in rural and remote communities will also improve working conditions for health-care workers.

Actions and Investments

- Building new, upgraded and expanded hospitals and health-care facilities in rural and other communities, including:
 - Trail, expanded Kootenay Boundary Regional Hospital with new pharmacy and ambulatory care centre
 - Terrace, new Mills Memorial Hospital
 - Dawson Creek, new Dawson Creek and District Hospital
 - Fort St. James, new Stuart Lake Hospital
 - Quesnel, new emergency department and Intensive Care Unit at G.R. Baker Memorial Hospital
 - Williams Lake, upgraded Cariboo Memorial Hospital
 - Kamloops, new tower at Royal Inland Hospital and the construction of a new cancer centre
 - North Cowichan, new Cowichan District Hospital
 - Nanaimo, intensive-care unit replacement and new high-acuity unit expansion, and the construction of a new cancer centre
 - Port McNeill and Port Hardy hospitals, upgrades to maternity, emergency departments, trauma and nurses' stations, as well as bringing in mobile CT scanner
- Constructing a new state-of-the-art Seven Sisters mental-health facility in Terrace to offer enhanced mental-health services to people in northwestern B.C. as part of the Mills Memorial Hospital replacement project. This new mental-health facility is expected to be complete in late fall 2023.
 - The new hospital will also see an improvement in mental-health services, with 20 of the 78 beds dedicated to adult in-patient psychiatric care.
- Expanding access to same-day, urgent, non-emergency health care, and primary health-care teams with new urgent and primary care centres in rural and regional communities, including:
 - Nanaimo
 - Prince George
 - Quesnel
 - Ashcroft
 - Castlegar
 - Cranbrook
 - Kelowna
 - West Kelowna
 - Vernon
 - Penticton
 - Kamloops
- Building new long-term care homes in Campbell River, Nelson, Vernon, and two in Comox, with more to come soon, allowing seniors to get access to the health care they need as they age in their home communities.


EXPANDING THE ROLE OF PHARMACISTS

Community pharmacies play a crucial role in the health-care system, offering easy access to essential services. They are dependable and well-respected fixtures in communities of all sizes.

Recognizing this, government has expanded the role played by pharmacists in B.C. to better serve more people in more communities.

Actions and Investments

- Pharmacists throughout B.C. can now assess and prescribe treatments for 21 minor ailments and contraception at their local pharmacy.
- This includes more than 60 types of birth control.
- Community pharmacists in B.C. are now also able to renew and adjust prescriptions for many conditions.



“The rapid deployment of the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day technology and partnership with groups like the Rural Coordination Centre of BC is an example of how technology can provide real solutions for our more vulnerable communities by delivering fast and effective primary health care where it is needed.”

– Richard Jock, chief executive officer,
First Nations Health Authority

RECRUITING, TRAINING AND RETAINING HEALTH WORKERS

Recruiting and retaining qualified health-care workers is a challenge facing every region of the province, and one that is affecting communities across Canada and around the world.

B.C.'s Health Human Resources Strategy contains 70 actions to address these challenges in every part of B.C. It lays out a plan to build a stronger health-care workforce and deliver better services for people and families.

Actions and Investments

- Hiring and keeping more skilled medical professionals in rural communities with prototype rural retention incentives for health-care workers in the Northern Health Authority.
 - These incentives are helping address acute health staffing challenges in the northeastern region, Hazelton, and Prince Rupert starting in 2021.
- This prototype program was used to develop similar incentives to recruit and retain skilled medical workers in Interior Health starting in 2022, and the North Island region of Island Health starting in 2023.
- Increasing seats in post-secondary institutions throughout the province, including;
 - 128 new annual seats at the University of British Columbia's (UBC) medical school, including in the Northern, Southern (Interior) and Island Medical Programs
 - 602 new nursing seats throughout the province
 - 20 new seats at UBC's midwifery program
- Making it easier for internationally educated health-care professionals to join B.C.'s health workforce by accelerating the recognition of their credentials and offering bursaries to help with the costs of becoming licensed so they can put their skills to work in local communities faster.
- Launching a second medical school at Simon Fraser University.

Nurses, midwives and B.C. ambulance paramedics and dispatchers have also reached three-year agreements to increase wages, benefits and working conditions that are critically important for the retention and recruitment of these health-care professionals for rural and remote communities.

BRINGING HEALTH CARE TO PEOPLE

As part of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, government worked with key health-care partners to rapidly develop and deploy a suite of new virtual primary-care services and supports to address urgent health-care needs, particularly in rural, remote and First Nations B.C. communities. This includes the Real Time Virtual Supports (RTVS) programs that offer services directly to people and provide specialist and peer support for local care providers as part of government's commitment to deliver high-quality health care to people in every part of B.C.

"With support from the province, we can improve the stability of our organization as well as increase our operating capacity, so more people in the East Kootenay area can access the health services they need with fewer obstacles."

– Brent Bidston, founder and vice-chair of Angel Flight East Kootenay

As part of this effort, government worked closely with the First Nations Health Authority, which collaborated with local First Nations communities to ensure that Indigenous people have access to quality, culturally safe virtual primary care.

Actions and Investments

- Offering people in rural, remote and First Nations communities expanded access to primary care through Real-Time Virtual Support, including access to doctors through 811.
 - Full-service family and emergency physicians are available daily from 9 a.m. until 11 p.m.
 - HealthLink BC's Virtual Physician Services includes physicians, pharmacists, virtual consult support staffing, medical leadership, evaluation and technology costs for HealthLink BC Emergency iDoctor-in-assistance.
- Virtual access to primary health care, mental-health care and substance-use care through the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA).
- Improving access to specialist knowledge throughout B.C. with Real-Time Virtual Support for care providers to address maternal and pediatric health questions as well as provide consultations and secondary opinions on generalist issues.
- Opening a Northern Health Virtual Primary and Community Care Clinic for people living in the most remote and underserved communities, those without a family physician or nurse practitioner and those in need of everyday health care.
- With the help of our partners, including FNHA and regional health authorities, taking action to address challenges in accessing health care by transforming access to primary care in rural and First Nations communities. For example:
 - Improving how we compensate doctors and nurse practitioners to recruit more primary-care providers and meet the needs of people throughout B.C.
 - Expanding the Health Connect Registry to better connect newly recruited primary-care providers to the people who need them starting in 2023.

Help to address mental health, substance use and brain injuries

Challenges arising from mental health, substance use and brain injuries are some of the most difficult challenges a person can face. These conditions can undermine a person's sense of who they are and what matters, and lead to challenging behaviours that friends, family and the broader community can struggle to understand and navigate.

When people are experiencing these challenges they need compassionate care, and they need it quickly. Unfortunately, between 2001 and 2017 little was done to build up the mental-health, substance-use and brain-injury supports that people need, especially in rural communities.

Since then, government has been hard at work building an integrated continuum of mental-health and addiction care that works for all British Columbians, no matter where they live in the province. It's going to take time to catch up after more than a decade and a half of inaction, but we're moving quickly to build up the infrastructure and local capacity needed to get people the help they need, close to home.

NEW PEER ASSISTED CARE TEAMS FOR RURAL AND INTERIOR COMMUNITIES

Responding to mental-health crisis situations with community-based care saves money, frees up police resources and keeps people out of emergency rooms and courtrooms.

That's why government is taking steps to expand Peer Assisted Care Teams throughout B.C., starting with an additional three teams in rural and Interior communities.

Peer Assisted Care Teams are made up of mental-health professionals and peer workers who work together to respond to calls related to feelings of hopelessness or despair, social isolation, loneliness, fear, anxiety, thoughts of self-harm and suicide, substance use or other mental-health challenges.

After seeing the success of the initial three teams, government committed to creating another seven community teams, starting with three new teams in rural and Interior communities.

It takes time to build local capacity and expertise to create these teams, but government is working hard to quickly expand this new service to more communities.

Actions and Investments

- Expanding Peer Assisted Care Teams into rural and Interior communities, starting with Prince George, Kamloops and the Comox Valley (serving Courtenay, Comox and Cumberland).
 - Another four community teams will be added as part of government's 2022 commitment to expand this program. The location of these teams is still under consideration.
 - Government is also funding the creation of an additional two specialized Indigenous-led peer response teams.
- From January until May 2023, the existing three Peer Assisted Care Teams received more than 700 calls, and the teams had to request police assistance due to a risk of safety or harm only three times.

EXPANDED ACCESS TO MENTAL-HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE-USE SUPPORTS

It's essential that people who need mental-health and substance-use supports can quickly find and stay connected to the care they need. That's why government is taking action to strengthen mental-health and substance-use supports for people throughout B.C.

Actions and Investments

- Improving access to substance-use treatment and recovery care with a \$586-million investment in Budget 2023. This will fund a number of actions, including:
 - 100 new publicly funded community adult substance-use treatment and recovery beds with no fees for British Columbians;
 - a new model of seamless care to support people through their entire recovery journey with 95 beds, with plans to expand this model to three more sites in B.C.;
 - expanding the Red Fish Healing Centre model of care across the province so more people have access to these services closer to home;
 - new after-care services at four new community recovery sites with dedicated workers to make sure people continue to receive the support they need when they leave a treatment facility;
 - investing in Indigenous-led services; and
 - increasing services for young people, including crisis supports, culturally safe wraparound services, enhanced transition services and improved emergency room hospital-based care and discharge planning.
- Providing access to low- and no-cost counselling services through grants to 49 community counselling agencies.

"We are hearing from the existing PACT communities that these teams have been a missing option for people in crisis. People and their loved ones have reported being relieved that they have an alternative to police to call in times of crisis. We know the impact is felt with every call and PACT's community-led approach to service has resulted in people being heard and connected, helping to ultimately transform how we approach situations of distress."

– Jonny Morris, CEO, CMHA BC

MORE SUPPORTS FOR PEOPLE WITH BRAIN INJURIES AND OTHER COMPLEX CARE NEEDS

Brain injuries can result from various causes, including overdose, trauma from accidents, falls, sports-related incidents, and violence. They can also occur due to non-traumatic causes such as strokes, brain tumours, infections and certain medical conditions.

Brain injuries are increasing in B.C., largely as a result of overdoses caused by poisoned illicit drugs.

Recognizing the need for action to address these rising needs and for supports to help people get along in the community when they have complex needs, government is increasing investments in community organizations that support people with brain injuries and opening complex-care housing.

Actions and Investments

- Creating new complex-care housing throughout B.C. for people who face overlapping mental-health and addiction challenges as well as other complex health issues, such as brain injuries.
 - This housing is already open or underway in 15 communities, including Terrace, Prince George, Sechelt, Bella Coola, Kamloops and Kelowna, and more help for more communities is on the way.
- Investing \$4.5 million in the Brain Injury Alliance to help B.C. patients coping with post-injury challenges, including those resulting from toxic-drug poisoning.
 - Alliance members provide services throughout the province, including in Campbell River, Courtenay, Duncan, Nanaimo, Powell River, Smithers, Terrace, Kitimat, the Nass Valley, Quesnel, Dawson Creek, Kamloops, Prince George, Osoyoos, Oliver, Keremeos, Princeton, Okanagan Falls, Penticton and Summerland.
 - These community associations run rehabilitative programs and offer services to people with brain injuries, including counselling, life-skills supports and homelessness prevention.

MENTAL-HEALTH AND ADDICTION SUPPORTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGHOUT B.C.

Young people deserve the best possible start in life. Wellness promotion, early intervention and prevention can often stop little problems from becoming bigger down the road.

For more than a decade and a half government failed to develop these services – especially in rural and Interior communities, leaving young people and their families struggling to get mental-health and substance-use care.

Starting in 2017, work began in earnest to turn the situation around, and government began creating Foundry Centres throughout the province, most of them in rural and Interior communities.

These centres provide young people between 12 and 24 access to free and confidential mental-health and substance-use supports, physical and sexual health care, peer support and social services, all in one location.

Actions and Investments

- There are currently 16 Foundry Centres open – nine of them in rural and Interior communities: Courtenay, Campbell River, Kelowna, Prince George, Penticton, Terrace, Williams Lake, Squamish and Port Hardy.
 - An additional seven new Foundry Centres are in development – five of them in rural and Interior communities: Burns Lake, Cranbrook, Fort St. John, Kamloops and Sunshine Coast.
- This is up from just one centre in the province, in Vancouver, at the beginning of 2017.
- 12 more Foundry Centres are being built with investments from Budget 2023.
 - The first of these new centres have been announced – one in Vernon and one in Powell River.
- At least 35 Foundry Centres will be open or under development provincially by 2025/26.

Affordable housing in the community you call home

Everyone in B.C. needs a place to call home. Whether you live in a big city or a remote coastal village, access to safe and suitable housing is the foundation of healthy families and strong communities. But in many parts of B.C., it has become tough for families to find an affordable, decent place to live.

That's why government is continuing to accelerate action to address housing challenges throughout B.C. and delivering new and innovative solutions designed to meet the needs of all sizes and kinds of communities, with the *Homes for People* action plan, released in spring 2023.

This plan continues the work government has been doing since 2017 to address a housing affordability crisis that has touched nearly every community in B.C.

Housing supply is an important part of housing affordability. To reflect this, new and enhanced investments and actions are on the way to speed up delivery of new homes and increase the supply of middle-income housing in communities throughout B.C.

With strong provincial leadership and solid partnerships with First Nations, municipalities, the federal government and community non-profit groups, we're on track to put more housing back in the hands of people, not speculators, unlock more homes faster, improve affordability, and help those with the greatest need.

Actions and Investments

- More than 76,000 homes in communities throughout B.C. have been added or are underway since 2017.
- With continued strong leadership from the province, 114,000 homes will be available for people throughout B.C. by 2027-28, including thousands of homes in rural, Interior and coastal communities.
- Providing grants to non-profit housing organizations throughout B.C. to buy residential rental buildings and co-ops, to protect tenants from eviction and prevent skyrocketing rental costs through a \$500-million Rental Protection Fund funded in Budget 2023.
- Funding the construction and operation of 6,000 new subsidized rental homes for families and seniors in need throughout B.C., through an expansion of the Community Housing Fund.
- This is in addition to approximately 9,000 new homes funded and built through this program since 2017.

Subsidized and supportive housing

- Since 2017, we've opened thousands of new subsidized homes in rural communities throughout B.C., including:
 - 145 subsidized homes in Nelson
 - 21 subsidized homes in Valemout
- Thousands more subsidized spaces are underway for rural communities, including:
 - 100 subsidized homes in Courtenay
 - 116 subsidized homes in Fort St. John

WORKING TOGETHER TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is a significant issue affecting people and communities throughout B.C. and addressing it is a critical priority.

For more than a decade and a half, provincial investments in housing for people with the highest health and affordability challenges were too low and too slow to meet community demand.

During this period of inaction, communities outside of the Lower Mainland and the Capital Region received very little help building and operating housing for people with the highest affordability and support needs, leading to many communities seeing a spike in street homelessness and encampments as housing costs rose.

This includes communities such as Sechelt and Lower Post where new provincial investments in supportive housing had not been made in a decade or more.

We are working to improve access to a range of services and supports for those sheltering outdoors around the province, while helping communities manage encampments and other issues related to homelessness.

Homelessness is a complex problem that will require strong partnerships with First Nations, local governments and the federal government, as well as actions across government to address. Government is working not just to address homelessness when it happens but to prevent it through treating root causes such as untreated mental illnesses, problematic substance use, and lack of support and access to opportunities.

Actions and Investments

- Delivering new subsidized and supportive housing to more than 100 communities in rural B.C., including communities such as Dawson Creek that had never received provincial support to build and operate this kind of housing.
- Since 2017, we've opened thousands of new supportive homes in rural communities throughout B.C., including:
 - 179 spaces in supportive housing in Vernon
 - 32 spaces in supportive housing in Dawson Creek
- Thousands more spaces in supportive housing are on the way for rural communities, including:
 - 40 spaces in supportive housing in Cranbrook
 - 34 spaces in supportive housing Grand Forks
- Creating new Homeless Encampment Action Response Teams (HEART) to rapidly respond to encampments and better support people sheltering outdoors to move inside, throughout the province.
 - The program will bring together provincial and local governments, Indigenous and First Nations partners, Northern Health and non-profit organizations to quickly assess the needs of people sheltering in encampments and provide rapid access to the supports and services they need to exit homelessness.
 - Health, sanitation, income, harm reduction, fire safety, and social and cultural supports will all be provided through the program.
- Delivering new emergency housing, shelter options and immediate co-ordinated supports to assist people in encampments or sheltering in public space to come inside and access temporary or permanent housing options that fit their needs through new Homeless Encampment Action Response Temporary Housing (HEARTH).
- Providing enhanced supports, including housing supports, for youth leaving care and transitioning to adulthood.
- These and other actions to address homelessness are being supported through a \$1.4 billion investment in Budget 2023 as part of the *Homes for People* action plan.

HELPING HOMEOWNERS BUILD RENTAL HOMES THROUGHOUT B.C.

Multi-unit, purpose-built condominiums and rental buildings are not the right solution for every housing problem – particularly in small, rural and remote communities.

That's one reason why, beginning in early 2024, homeowners will be able to access a forgivable loan of up to 50% of the cost of renovations, and up to a maximum of \$40,000, to create new long-term rental housing on their property, for rental at below market rates.

Supporting and empowering homeowners in eligible municipalities to do their part to help ease the housing crisis by building new secondary suites and laneway homes is one way government is working to address the housing needs of people in all kinds and sizes of communities.

Actions and Investments

- Offering at least 3,000 homeowners a rebate for costs to build new homes for affordable, long-term rental on their properties.
 - This pilot program is part of Budget 2023's *Homes for People* plan.

WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO BUILD HOUSING

Indigenous Peoples in B.C. face unique challenges when it comes to housing, whether they live in urban areas or in rural and remote communities, on reserve or off.

Systemic and pervasive racism against Indigenous Peoples remains a significant barrier to finding good housing for many Indigenous families.

In 2018, in recognition of the need for culturally safe, distinctions-based housing to meet these

challenges, the provincial government created the \$550-million Building BC: Indigenous Housing Fund.

Key to this bold step toward a stronger future was a historic choice to make on-reserve housing eligible for funding from this and other provincial housing programs. Because on-reserve housing is a federal responsibility, provincial governments have excluded on-reserve projects from housing funding.

Together we're making progress, but as people in communities of all sizes continue to struggle with the cost and availability of housing, more needs to be done.

That's why we're doubling this program to build and operate a total of 3,500 homes for Indigenous people as part of Budget 2023's *Homes for People* plan.

Actions and Investments

- Working with First Nations and Indigenous partners to build and operate an additional 1,750 homes as part of Budget 2023's *Homes for People* plan.
 - These new homes will be in addition to the 1,750 new spaces in Indigenous housing that were committed in 2017, bringing the total to 3,500.

OPENING THE DOORS OF OPPORTUNITY WITH NEW STUDENT HOUSING

In the decade and a half before 2017, the provincial government built a total of just 130 student housing spaces at colleges, universities and technical institutes in B.C.

This decade and a half of inaction had a particularly profound effect on the availability of homes for students at smaller college and university campuses in rural B.C. that didn't have the mandate, capital

or financing to build the student housing needed to enable people from all parts of B.C. to access education and training.

Starting in 2017, renewed provincial leadership began the hard work of turning the student housing situation around.

As of 2023, more than 7,700 new student homes on post-secondary campuses in every region of B.C. were open or underway. This is creating much-needed homes for students and making space for other renters to find homes.

We've made tremendous progress, but there is still more to do. That's why government is building another 4,000 student homes over the next four years.

Actions and Investments

- New student housing is already open and helping people attend school in rural and Interior communities, including:
 - 533 spaces in Kamloops at Thompson Rivers University
 - 220 spaces in Kelowna at the University of British Columbia Okanagan
 - 100 spaces in Cranbrook at the College of the Rockies
 - 108 spaces in Terrace at Coast Mountain College
- More student housing in rural and Interior communities is already approved and under construction, including:
 - 100 spaces in Vernon at Okanagan College
 - 216 spaces in Kelowna at Okanagan College
 - 114 spaces in Castlegar at Selkirk College
 - 36 spaces in Nelson at Selkirk College
 - 217 spaces in the Comox Valley at North Island College
 - 266 spaces in Nanaimo at Vancouver Island University
 - An additional 148 spaces in Kamloops at Thompson River University
- Another 4,000 student homes will be built in areas of highest unmet demand, making it easier and more affordable for students to pursue education and training opportunities outside their home community.
 - These new student homes are being funded with a \$575-million investment through Budget 2023's *Homes for People* action plan.

HOUSING TO HELP PEOPLE LEAVE ABUSE BEHIND

Together with people from all walks of life and parts of society, government has been working hard to end intimate partner abuse and gender-based violence in B.C. Key to this work is providing people with safety and supports so women can leave abuse behind without putting themselves or their children at risk of becoming unhoused.

Since 2017, government has been delivering transition housing to communities throughout B.C., including communities such as Duncan and Kitimat, which had not received support to build and operate this kind of housing for more than a decade.

Actions and Investments

- Building 3,000 transition housing, second-stage housing and long-term housing spaces for women and children leaving violence throughout B.C.
 - Half of these spaces are being funded with a new \$1.2-billion investment through 2023's *Homes for People* plan.
- Since 2017, seven rural communities opened transition housing for the first time, including Invermere, Courtenay, MacKenzie, Penticton, Duncan, Campbell River and Prince George, with more to come, thanks to funding from the Women's Transition Housing Fund.

Strong public services you can count on

People in every part of the province rely on provincial services and programs to meet their needs. The geography of rural and remote areas has long made it challenging to deliver equal access to services in every part of B.C., however, as we move closer to fulfilling our commitment to deliver high-speed internet connectivity to every community in the province by 2027, it is opening up new and exciting opportunities for enhanced service delivery throughout B.C.

However, many services, such as child care, just can't be delivered virtually. To improve access, we're investing in the infrastructure and skilled workers needed to deliver high-quality public services throughout the province.

HIGH-QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION IN GOOD RURAL SCHOOLS

Strong public schools are the heart and soul of communities. Without access to high-quality public education, communities can't thrive.

We're confident in the future of rural, Interior and coastal communities. That's why we're investing in that future by building new, expanded and upgraded schools throughout the province, including new schools in Quesnel, Kelowna and Trail, additions to schools in Fernie and Pouce Coupe, major seismic upgrades in Masset, Ucluelet and Nanaimo, and more.

School gyms are important not just for physical education and school events, but as places to gather, host celebrations, and participate in ceremonies and cultural activities. As part of our investments in strong rural communities, we're building the very first purpose-built school gyms in the communities of Upper Halfway and Gitwinksihlkw.

Actions and Investments

- Boosting funding for rural school districts in 2023-24 by another \$19 million through an increase to the Unique Geographic Factors supplement.
 - This supplement provided a total of \$360 million in additional funding for schools in rural and remote communities in 2023-24.
 - This funding has increased by 32% since 2016-17.
- Drastically reducing school closures – more than 200 schools were closed between 2001 and 2016, many of them in rural communities.
 - Over the past six years, just 12 schools have closed.
- Delivering new schools, additions and upgrades to support students in rural, remote and Interior communities, including:
 - Pouce Coupe: Two new classrooms at Pouce Coupe Elementary
 - Nanaimo: Seismic upgrades at Pleasant Valley Elementary and Cilaire Elementary, and a new stand-alone two-storey addition to Ecole Hammond Bay Elementary
 - Quesnel: A new Quesnel Junior School with space for 550 students
 - Trail: A new Glenmerry Elementary School with space for an additional 165 students. The new school will also include a neighbourhood learning centre and space for before- and after-school child care
 - Upper Halfway: A new, accessible gym with kitchen facilities at Upper Halfway School
 - Kelowna: Building a new secondary school in West Kelowna – George Pringle Secondary School, and building an addition to Dr. Knox Middle School
 - Kamloops: Expanding Valleyview Secondary, replacing Parkcrest Elementary, and building a new Pineview Valley Elementary school and learning centre
 - Armstrong: A new gym at Pleasant Valley Secondary
 - Gitwinksihlkw: A new gym at Gitwinksihlkw Elementary
 - Fernie: A new kindergarten addition to Isabella Dicken Elementary
 - Masset: Upgrading Gudangaay Tlaats'gaa Naay to reflect modern standards of seismic safety and tsunami preparedness

BUILDING PLAYGROUNDS THROUGHOUT B.C.

School playgrounds are the heart of active, family-friendly communities.

For too long, school districts relied on parents and students fundraising to buy new playground equipment in the absence of provincial support.

This led to a situation where only some neighbourhoods and communities had access to high-quality outdoor play spaces, while many were left out and left behind.

Starting in 2018, government created the Playgrounds Equipment Program and began work to upgrade and replace playgrounds throughout the province.

Actions and Investments

- In 2018, government created a \$5-million annual fund, the Playground Equipment Program, to replace or build new school playgrounds to relieve the fundraising burden on parents.
 - Since then, we've invested \$35 million in 256 new playgrounds. This program has benefited more than 63,000 B.C. students.

SUPPORTING ONLINE AND HOME-BASED LEARNING

Some families, especially those in remote communities, rely on online and home-based learning for their children.

To support families and improve equitable access to high-quality online schooling, the province launched a new Online Learning model for B.C. on July 1, 2023. This new model includes new Provincial Online Learning Schools, a Provincial Learning Management System, and the Online Learning BC website, which will make it easier for families to find and access online courses and programs.

Actions and Investments

- Improving access to high-quality online learning options for families in every part of the province through the Provincial Online Learning Schools.
 - Families can search for all online courses and programs on the new Online Learning BC website.

HALFWAY GYM

Students at Upper Halfway school are in kindergarten to Grade 10 and live in rural and First Nations communities outside of Fort St. John. The school was constructed without a gym when it was built in 1960.

Students currently have access to the Halfway Graham Community Hall for limited indoor play, but it is not wheelchair accessible, has

no washroom facilities and is located 300 metres from the school along a path that requires plowing in winter.

The new, accessible and inclusive gym, which is under construction with an investment of \$5.72 million from the province, will also include a kitchen facility so that it can host school activities as well as community events, celebrations and gatherings.

MAKING CHILD CARE A CORE SERVICE THROUGHOUT B.C.

Affordable, high-quality child care is critical to supporting families to work, upgrade their skills and pursue their dreams.

Every family deserves support in reaching their goals, which is why we're building a future where affordable, high-quality, inclusive child care is a core service that families in every part of the province can rely on.

Actions and Investments

- Reduced child care fees by as much as \$900 per month per child for families with eligible children at participating licensed child care centres in communities throughout B.C.
- Funded more than 32,500 new, high-quality child care spaces in B.C. since 2018, with 14,600 of them in rural communities.
- Increased wages for early childhood educators by \$4 per hour to make it easier for child care centres to recruit and retain these skilled workers.
- Creating 1,713 new spaces in early childhood education programs at post-secondary schools, more than doubling the number of seats since 2018.
- Delivered more than \$27 million to provide more than 14,100 bursaries to support almost 7,500 students in early childhood education programs.

PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOL DISTRICT 67, OKANAGAN SKAHA

Government is partnering with the Okanagan Skaha School District to deliver 320 new child care spaces at four schools as part of accelerating efforts to co-locate new child care centres on school grounds. This approach is helping us create more child care spaces, faster, while making life easier and more convenient for families.

The four new child care centres will have 80 spaces each. They will be located on school grounds at Wiltse, Parkway and Uplands elementary schools in Penticton, and Giant's Head Elementary in Summerland.

Funded with an investment of more than \$17 million in 2023, these four new child care centres are expected to be open and providing high-quality child care by 2025.



UPGRADING INFRASTRUCTURE IN GROWING COMMUNITIES

Infrastructure is key to public services – whether these services are delivered by the province or communities. Recognizing that it can be more difficult for smaller communities to raise the funds they need for critical infrastructure, government has been working closely with communities to move forward on their priorities.

To support this, local governments received a \$1-billion boost through one-time funding to

address the needs of their growing communities in 2023. These grants are flowed to municipalities and regional districts using a funding formula that reflects population size and growth.

The province has also been working with communities to build critical community infrastructure to support clean drinking water, treatment of wastewater and solid waste, and greenhouse gas reduction through the \$450 million Critical Infrastructure Fund.



Actions and Investments

- \$1 billion distributed to all 188 B.C. municipalities and regional districts to reflect their needs and priorities in 2023.
- Building critical community infrastructure to support clean drinking water, treatment of wastewater and solid waste, and greenhouse gas reduction through the \$450 million for critical community infrastructure. Projects supported by this fund include:
 - improving water quality in Radium Hot Springs by installing a sedimentation pond, and a new raw-water intake and screening chamber at the Forster Creek source, with a \$2.5-million investment from the fund;
 - decommissioning the Lind Creek Dam in Greenwood to restore fish habitat with \$900,000 from the fund;
 - upgrades to the watermain and storm drainage systems and replacement of a deteriorating sewage main in Rossland, while improving pedestrian and transportation infrastructure above, with \$1.3 million from the fund;
 - supporting a new wastewater treatment plant that will reduce marine pollution and enhance access to fishing and shellfish aquaculture development, with a \$20 million investment from the fund; and
 - upgrades to water infrastructure for people in Armstrong with \$14.5 million from the fund.
- New and expanded local services are being supported by a \$2.4-million investment from the Northern Healthy Communities Fund, which is supported by the B.C. government and administered by the Northern Development Initiative Trust. Example projects include:
 - a new Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre in Houston;
 - the expansion of the Clearview Landfill near Fort St. James;
 - a Chronic Pain Network that will provide patient education in self-management as part of a larger program for chronic pain intervention for people in northern communities;
 - an advertising and marketing campaign to attract workers and new business services to Kitimat;
 - a program co-ordinator in the village of Telkwa to support emergency preparedness, response and recovery activities; and
 - nine projects throughout Terrace to support community safety, land-use planning, increased housing and homelessness prevention.

ENCOURAGING SKILLED IMMIGRANTS TO CHOOSE RURAL, INTERIOR, AND COASTAL COMMUNITIES

As the only immigration program under provincial control, the BC Provincial Nominee Program enables the province to directly select qualified prospective immigrants and nominate them and their families for permanent residency.

Since 2019, we have worked in collaboration with communities with a population of 75,000 or less to attract international entrepreneurs to establish new businesses. To date, more than 50 international entrepreneurs are in various stages of establishing new businesses in these communities.

Building on this collaborative approach, the province is further connecting with regional representatives to help business owners throughout B.C. connect with highly skilled immigrants so they can get the talent they need to grow their businesses and local economies.

As of Nov. 16, 2022, candidates for the BC Provincial Nomination Program skills immigration stream who are offered a qualifying job outside of Metro Vancouver, who have worked at least one year outside of Metro Vancouver, or who have recently graduated from a post-secondary institution outside of Metro Vancouver, will receive higher priority and greater access to the program.

By working directly with communities to improve these programs, we're creating new pathways for international workers and graduates to contribute to our vision of a bright future, where people can pursue good lives in strong communities throughout B.C.

Building safer communities

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their community. That's why in November 2022, the province launched a new *Safer Communities Action Plan* with immediate steps that will strengthen enforcement to keep those who commit repeat violent offences off our streets, and strengthen services to build safe and healthy communities for everyone.

Actions and Investments

- Hiring another 256 RCMP officers to enhance enforcement and crime prevention capacity, particularly for rural, remote and First Nations communities, with a \$230-million investment in Budget 2023. This will help police focus on violent crimes and other pressing public safety issues.
- Upgrading 911 services in B.C. to bring them up to modern standards, which will allow people the choice to contact 911 through new options, such as real-time text.

ACTION ON REPEAT OFFENDERS

People in B.C. are compassionate. Most people in the province recognize that at their root, many criminal behaviours are related to complex social and health issues.

However, this compassion has limits and those limits have been breached by repeat offenders who repeatedly commit disruptive and violent crimes in communities big and small throughout B.C., draining local resources and leaving people feeling unsafe.

The rise of repeat offenders is linked to unintended impacts of federal law changes and subsequent Supreme Court decisions.

Government is committed to tackling the complex issue of repeat violent offending and we're backing that commitment with concrete action through actions in the *Safer Communities Action Plan*.

Actions and Investments

- Launching new repeat violent offender co-ordinated response teams, made up of police and dedicated prosecutors and probation officers in communities throughout B.C.
- Building public confidence in the prosecution system with new direction from the Attorney General to prosecutors to implement a clear and understandable approach to bail for repeat violent offenders within the existing federal law.

EXPANDING MOBILE INTEGRATED CRISIS RESPONSE TEAMS

As many as 20 per cent of police interactions in B.C. involve someone experiencing a mental-health crisis. While police do their best to manage these calls on their own, they aren't trained mental-health professionals and they aren't always in the best position to respond to people in distress.

Mobile Integrated Crisis Response Teams are specialized units that team a police officer with a mental-health professional to respond to mental-health calls.

The health-care worker provides on-site emotional and mental-health assessments, crisis intervention and referrals to appropriate services in the community, while the police officer makes sure everyone is safe.

When people are in crisis because of mental-health or substance-use challenges, we want them met with care and compassion. These crisis response teams support people in distress and connect them to the services they need, while preventing

the criminalization of people for being in mental-health crisis.

Recognizing the importance of these teams in reducing stigma and improving the outcome of mental-health calls, government is expanding these teams to nine new communities, including another four in rural and Interior communities.

Actions and Investments

- Nine new Mobile Integrated Crisis Response Teams are being created in 2023, including teams in Penticton, Vernon, Prince Rupert and Squamish.
 - There were already 10 teams throughout B.C., including in Kamloops, Kelowna, Prince George, Fort St. John and Nanaimo
- This brings the total number of teams to 19 provincewide.

A cleaner, more secure future

MITIGATING, PREPARING FOR AND RESPONDING TO DISASTERS

The size, scale, scope and severity of natural and climate-driven hazards has increased markedly, not in a generation, not in a lifetime, but in the span of a career for many firefighters and other emergency responders in B.C.

People who live on the forest's doorstep have always recognized fire is a threat to be respected and reckoned with. But we have gone from a time when big fires were less frequent, and smoke was localized, to a new reality where smoke often blankets the province, atmospheric rivers wash away even the biggest highways, and months-long droughts threaten farms, fisheries and communities.

As the problems we face change, the ways we respond to these challenges need to change as well.

As part of that, starting in 2022, government began transforming the BC Wildfire Service from a largely seasonal organization into a year-round standing service that can take a more responsive and cohesive approach to mitigating and preparing for the threat of wildfires and other hazards. With fires

becoming larger, hotter and more unpredictable, it's critical to maintain a skilled and experienced workforce to do this difficult, heroic work.

This new approach will be further entrenched with new emergency-management legislation to be introduced in fall 2023. When it's introduced, it will be the first land-based legislation co-developed by First Nations and the provincial government.

Actions and Investments

- Protecting people and property in B.C. with new emergency-management legislation with an emphasis on reducing the risks facing communities.
 - The legislation will lay the foundation for a more comprehensive approach to emergency management, moving away from a response-based approach to one that encompasses all four phases of emergency management, including mitigation, preparedness and recovery.
 - For the first time, the act will require the consideration of climate change in emergency-management planning.
 - This is the first land-based legislation co-developed with First Nations in B.C.
- Transforming the BC Wildfire Service into a standing service that works year-round to prevent, mitigate and respond to wildfires.
 - A year-round service model will allow BC Wildfire Service to put more emphasis on all four pillars of emergency management: prevention and mitigation, preparedness, and response and recovery.
 - It will give us greater flexibility to deploy highly skilled BC Wildfire Service staff to assist with provincial natural hazard responses year round.
- Releasing a Water Scarcity Dashboard to help First Nations and local authorities with forecasting, modelling and real-time decision-making for water supply and demand concerns in response to the 2023 drought.
- Created a stand-alone ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness to bring resources and focus to this critical priority.

HELPING COMMUNITIES PREPARE FOR EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

Recent extreme weather events in B.C. have threatened people and damaged property, with most of the damage concentrated in rural, Interior and First Nations communities.

The rapidly increasing scale and frequency of climate-related disasters in B.C. makes it urgent for the province to work closely with local governments and First Nations to prepare for the risks of natural hazards and lessen the effects of extreme weather events before disasters happen.

To meet this need for urgency, in Budget 2023 government increased support for communities preparing for the risk of natural disasters related to climate change, and funded the creation of a new one-stop online platform to help people and communities better prepare for, mitigate and understand disaster and climate risks.

Actions and Investments

- Helping local governments and First Nations prepare for climate-related emergencies by funding projects to address hazards and mitigate the damage caused by extreme weather events through a further \$180-million investment in the Community Emergency Preparedness Fund.
 - The new contribution brings the total amount invested in this important fund to \$369 million since it was first established in 2017.
- Helped communities prepare for and prevent flood hazards with 24 flood-mitigation, risk and hazard assessment projects as part of a federal and provincial partnership through the National Disaster Mitigation Program.
- Created the ClimateReadyBC online platform to make it easier for First Nations, local governments, professionals and the public to understand, prepare for and reduce the risks associated with extreme heat, wildfires, floods, droughts and water scarcity, earthquakes and other hazards.



CREATING A NEW ENERGY ACTION FRAMEWORK

The province's work to address the climate crisis requires all sectors do their part to reduce emissions, including the oil and gas sector. A new provincial energy action framework will ensure oil and gas sector projects fit within B.C.'s climate commitments and create new opportunities for people in the emerging clean-energy industry.

Actions and Investments

- Under the new energy action framework, the province will:
 - require all proposed LNG facilities in or entering the environmental assessment (EA) process to pass an emissions test with a credible plan to be net zero by 2030;
 - put in place a regulatory emissions cap for the oil and gas industry to ensure B.C. meets its 2030 emissions-reduction target for the sector;
 - establish a clean-energy and major projects office to fast track investment in clean energy and technology and create good, sustainable jobs in the transition to a cleaner economy; and
 - create a BC Hydro task force to accelerate the electrification of B.C.'s economy by powering more homes, businesses and industries with renewable electricity.

PROTECTING 30 PER CENT OF THE PROVINCE BY 2030

B.C. has the greatest diversity of species, ecosystems and habitats of any province or territory in Canada, and has always been a conservation leader.

Parks, conservancies and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas are critical to protecting wild spaces and the ecosystems that rely on them today and for generations to come. They are also important for tourism, wild food harvesting and other economic, social and cultural activities in rural and remote communities.

There are currently approximately 18.5 million hectares of protected and conserved areas in B.C., making up 19.6 per cent of its total land area. We've committed to expand on this strong foundation for healthy wild places and thriving ecosystems by conserving and protecting 30 per cent of B.C.'s land and marine areas by 2030.

It will take strong partnerships with First Nations, the federal government and local communities to deliver on this target, but we're already well on our way. In 2022, the province began a comprehensive review of B.C.'s *Wildlife Act* to improve the conservation and management of wildlife and important habitats, while also recognizing the interests of rights and title holders.

This review, which considers factors such as improved and updated approaches to land-use planning, ecosystem health, biodiversity and species at risk, will inform further consultation and engagement with Indigenous Peoples, municipalities and the general public before changes to laws and regulations are made.

Actions and Investments

- Supporting healthy ecosystems, tourism businesses and diverse rural economies by conserving and protecting 30 per cent of B.C.'s land and marine areas by 2030.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO SWITCH TO CLEAN-ENERGY GENERATION

Diesel electricity is an unfortunate reality in many remote First Nations communities. It's expensive, it pollutes the air and it stops communities from reaching their climate goals.

As part of changing this, the province is providing remote First Nations with as much as \$2 million in support of clean-energy projects that can power their homes, economies and daily lives with an extension of the Community Energy Diesel Reduction program.

Actions and Investments

- Supporting more remote First Nations communities to replace diesel power generation with cleaner options, including hydro-electric, solar, biomass and wind by doubling of the length of the Community Energy Diesel Reduction Program from three to six years with an additional \$30-million investment from the province.

HELPING COMMUNITIES LOWER EMISSIONS AND DIVERT WASTE FROM LANDFILLS

When organic waste such as food scraps, lawn clippings and landscaping debris are dumped in landfills, they can become a major source of climate-changing methane emissions. Methane traps 25 times as much heat as carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, making it a high priority to address at the source as part of meeting our shared climate-change goals.

Recognizing that not all communities have the capacity or economies of scale to manage organic waste without senior government support, the province partnered with the federal government to create and fund the Organics Infrastructure Program to invest in new composting facilities. Due to the program's success, the province launched the Organics Infrastructure and Collection Program, which supports organic processing facilities and curbside collection projects.

Actions and Investments

- Working with communities to increase organic waste processing capacity, address methane pollution and keep organic waste out of landfills, with \$20 million in grants available through the Organics Infrastructure Program and almost \$25.9 million under the Organics Infrastructure and Collection Program.



FORT NELSON WORM COMPOSTING

In 2017, Wilf Hoath, owner of a Fort Nelson chain restaurant, started vermicomposting to reduce the amount of garbage his business generated. It was wildly successful, with the worms quickly turning all his business's cardboard, food scraps and other organic waste into valuable compost.

His success attracted the attention of the regional municipality, which was looking for ways to divert organic waste from the local landfill; they partnered with him on a pilot project to see if vermicomposting could help.

During the first round, the pilot transformed 70,000 kilograms of waste into fertilizer. After testing, this fertilizer was approved for agricultural and landscaping use, and the municipality began planning to make vermicomposting a permanent part of the region's approach to managing food, yard and paper waste.

To help make this vision a reality, the provincial and federal governments delivered a \$445,092 grant for a new, permanent worm-composting facility through the Organics Infrastructure Program.

Investing in strong and diverse rural economies

Diversified economies are strong economies. Relying too heavily on a single business or industry leaves people vulnerable to boom-and-bust cycles that harm families and displace and disrupt communities.

People shouldn't have to leave the home they love to pursue work, opportunity and a good life. But for too long, that's been a reality for many people born in rural, remote and Interior communities.

By delivering high-speed connections throughout the province, helping goods and people get around, and bringing back rural expertise to government, we are laying the foundation of stronger, more diverse economies throughout B.C.

Building a strong, skilled rural workforce

Over the next decade, it's expected there will be more than one million job openings in B.C. – many in rural communities. The majority of these jobs – over 80 per cent – will require workers to have some kind of post-secondary education and training.

We need to make sure people in rural communities have the skills they need to seize these opportunities and employers are able to find the skilled workers they need to grow their businesses and the economy. Skilled local workers are also critical to government's ability to deliver strong public services in every part of the province.

Through the *StrongerBC: Future Ready Action Plan* and other government initiatives, government is working to increase access to skills training and post-secondary opportunities for people in every part of the province.

EXPANDING TRAINING FOR IN-DEMAND JOBS

All regions of the province are experiencing shortages of workers with important skills needed to deliver public services and grow the economy. Recognizing that people who learn in rural communities stay in rural communities, government is working hard to expand opportunities to learn the skills for these critical jobs throughout the province.

Actions and Investments

- Ensure everyone has the opportunity to learn new skills and secure good-paying jobs that will support them and their communities with the *Future Ready Action Plan*, with a \$480-million investment over three years through Budget 2023. Initiatives include:
 - a new grant for short-term skills training to cover the cost of training for in-demand jobs;
 - new funding to assist small and medium-sized businesses in solving their labour-market challenges and preparing for a changing economy;
 - more opportunities for, and co-developed with, Indigenous Peoples, including funding to the new Guardian and Stewardship Training Initiative; and
 - creating thousands of new training seats for in-demand fields to help build up a workforce ready and able to meet the demands of the future.
- \$2 million to improve access to primary care paramedic training and emergency medical responder training, including improved access to paramedic training in Kelowna and Trail, and improved access to emergency medical responder training in Cranbrook, Port Alberni and Prince George.
- A \$3-million bursary fund for health-care assistants registered in Access to Practical Pursuing (APN) programs from Sept. 1, 2021, until May 31, 2024, at qualifying public post-secondary institutions, including Coast Mountain College, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology and North Island College.
- \$15 million to support skills training for more than 1,700 Indigenous people throughout B.C. In the Interior, this includes programs such as a partnership between Lower Similkameen Indian Band and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology to deliver an Indigenous early childhood education diploma program.
- A new, free, accelerated program at Coast Mountain College is allowing aspiring early childhood educators (ECEs) to train closer to home at no cost while meeting community needs. Coast Mountain College is offering this program at its Kitimat campus from January until December 2023.
- \$3.5 million in 2023-24 for early childhood education programs that reach rural and remote learners through in-community, hybrid/blended and online delivery. This funding supports 281 student spaces in addition to base operating grant-funded program seats at 12 public post-secondary institutions.
- \$7.1 million for skills training toward Métis Nation British Columbia's (MNBC) Ministry of Skills Training, Employment, and Post-Secondary to support Métis learners.
- More than \$76.2 million to date has been invested in the Health Career Access Program (HCAP), which is an innovative employer-led training program launched in fall of 2020.
 - With funding available for as many as 3,000 participants annually, students in the Health Career Access Program receive a living wage stipend while completing tuition-free education.
 - Rural and remote partners have access to additional resources so participants can earn and learn in their communities, such as Port McNeill, Campbell River, Prince Rupert, Fort Nelson, Burns Lake and many more.

- \$42 million in ongoing annual funding to support 2,900 new student spaces in tech-related programs across the province, with a commitment to a further 3,000 spaces created over the next three years.
 - This includes new programs at institutions such as the College of New Caledonia, North Island College and Selkirk College.
- \$3.8 million in 2023-24 for 26 Adult Basic Education and English Language Learning Pathways at 12 public post-secondary institutions. These pathways support people obtaining the pre-requisites they need to access high-priority career programs, including in the areas of health care, early childhood education, skilled trades and technology.
 - Many of the pathways are helping learners in rural communities, including Hazelton, Fort Nelson, Lillooet and Hope.
- \$3.4 million annually for the Community Adult Literacy Program. In 2023-24, this funding will support delivery of 102 free adult, family and Indigenous literacy programs in 132 communities across the province.

IMPROVING EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

- \$44.8 million for Okanagan College to build a new Centre for Food, Wine and Tourism, which will include modern teaching spaces, food labs, beverage research and development facilities, and common spaces.
- \$3.4 million for Nicola Valley Training Institute for the purchase of three modern, innovative and fully equipped mobile training units to enable the delivery of leading-edge health-care training in rural and remote First Nations communities.
- \$1 million for renovations to transform the Greater Trail Community Centre into the newest campus of Selkirk College.

CO-DEVELOPING TRAINING FOR INDIGENOUS GUARDIANS

The place we call B.C. covers nearly 950,000 square kilometres – even more if one includes well-travelled maritime areas such as the 6,800-square-kilometre Strait of Georgia.

For millennia and to this day, First Nations have been stewards of the waters, land, wildlife and rich

resources of this vast area. They continue to be caretakers, first responders and knowledge keepers who manage and shape landscapes to encourage biodiversity, improve food abundance and enhance community safety.

“Guardians” is a term used to describe trained members of First Nations who undertake a wide variety of stewardship activities on the land base. Often called by different names (such as watchmen or rangers), guardians are employed by First Nations to serve as their “eyes and ears” or “boots on the ground” in their territories. Guardians are experts who help monitor and manage protected areas, restore animal and plant habitats, and contribute Indigenous knowledge to policy and project development.

In remote areas, Indigenous Guardians are also often first responders to both environmental and human emergencies on their territories.

Making watersheds and landscapes more resilient to climate change, assessing and addressing natural disasters, and restoring ecosystems throughout B.C. will require skilled workers in the most rural and

remote parts of the province. There is no one better suited to do this work than people who already know, love and live on the land.

A key goal of the StrongerBC Future Ready plan is to make post-secondary education and skills training more affordable and accessible in rural and remote communities. Working together with First Nations to develop a skilled workforce of Indigenous Guardians is key to that.

We're already seeing results of these investments from an earlier agreement with the Kitasoo Xai'xais and Nuxalk Nations. The first cohort of Guardians from these Nations were given their badges and recognized as full park rangers in July 2023, substantially increasing environmental law-enforcement capacity for more than 40 provincial parks and protected areas in their territories.



"This is groundbreaking; it's a historic day. It's a paradigm shift in how we work together with the province of B.C. These Guardians have passed all the required courses and completed all the required training, and recently graduated from the BC Park Ranger Boot Camp, and it's amazing to see this initiative come to life. This Park Ranger initiative will set a new path for our Guardians and we're able to come together today because of the people in the background on all levels helping to make it possible, making big moves to get to where we are today. If there's an example of reconciliation, this is it."

– Chief Doug Neasloss of the Kitasoo Xai'xais Nation

Actions and Investments

- Co-creating Indigenous Guardian training in partnership with First Nations to build up this skilled workforce and meet our shared goals of protecting, managing and restoring lands and waters in areas throughout B.C.
 - This training is being supported with as much as \$8.9 million over three years under the *Future Ready Skills for the Jobs of Tomorrow Plan*.
- The first cohort of Indigenous Guardians from Kitasoo Xai'xais and Nuxalk Nations received the badges and the legal powers and authority of full park rangers from BC Parks through the Guardian Shared Compliance and Enforcement Pilot Project in July 2023.
 - The Nuxalk and Kitasoo Xai'xais Nations have a long-standing Guardian program and have long worked collaboratively with BC Parks to manage more than 40 provincial parks and protected areas in their territories.
 - This landmark occasion formalizes the role Indigenous Guardians have long played in preventing, assessing and addressing poaching, polluting and other harmful activities on their territories.
 - The pilot, the first of its kind in Canada, resulted from an agreement between the Kitasoo Xai'xais and Nuxalk Nations and the province.

EXPANDING RURAL ACCESS TO WORK-TO-LEARN PROGRAMS

Education and skills-training opportunities that include work-to-learn components like co-ops, internships and practicums are more accessible and affordable for many. The ability to learn while earning a wage can make the difference for many families. And many learners thrive in a hands-on environment where they can develop confidence in their skills on the job.

In the past, these kinds of programs have been more limited in rural communities with smaller post-secondary institutions that don't have the resources to develop them.

As part of making post-secondary education and skills training more accessible throughout B.C., we are giving smaller post-secondary institutions the tools they need to strengthen and expand these work-to-learn options.

- Supporting post-secondary institutions, including Coast Mountain College, College of New Caledonia, College of the Rockies, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, North Island College, Northern Lights College, Selkirk College, and the University of Northern British Columbia to deliver more co-ops, internships, practicums and community-service-learning opportunities over four years with \$4.5 million from Budget 2023.

Growing crops and the economy

Agriculture industries are a major economic driver in many rural B.C. communities. Working with agricultural producers and manufacturers to boost production and add value to B.C.'s world-class agricultural products is a key way government is strengthening the economy in rural and small communities and supporting people to find good work and build a good life, wherever they live.

SUPPORTING FARMERS AND RANCHERS THROUGH CLIMATE CHANGE

It's arguable that no other industry is as sensitive to the impacts of climate change as agriculture. Farmers and ranchers rely on steady and predictable weather patterns and seasons to maximize production and profits.

Droughts, fires, floods, quick swings in temperature and other unusual weather can all disrupt food production and undermine the viability of agricultural industries. The long, harsh drought B.C. suffered throughout the summer of 2023 serves as a sharp reminder of this reality.

To address drought and other climate threats to agricultural production, government is providing supports to farmers and ranchers to upgrade infrastructure and improve practices to become more resilient in the face of a changing climate, while also supporting producers in the immediate term through challenging conditions.

Actions and Investments

- Supporting water users in drought-prone and water-scarce areas to adopt leading-edge water-management technology and use water more efficiently for agricultural uses such as irrigation and livestock watering through a \$20-million Agricultural Water Infrastructure Program.
 - The new program, created in 2023, is open to B.C. farmers, ranchers and agricultural producers, as well as First Nations communities, Indigenous producers, irrigation and improvement districts, local governments, and agricultural and conservation groups.
- Working with the federal government to help agricultural producers proactively mitigate the impacts of climate change with \$4 million in funding for the Beneficial Management Practices program.
- Introduced new Extreme Weather Preparedness for Agriculture program with \$1.4 million in 2022 and as much as \$2.5 million in 2023 to build a more resilient and sustainable agriculture sector by helping prepare for future climate events.

SUPPORTING FARMERS AND RANCHERS THROUGH THE 2023 DROUGHT

Government is working with farmers and ranchers on long-term solutions to new and intensifying problems caused by climate change, while also recognizing the need for swift supports in the face of immediate challenges, such as the long drought of 2023.

Government is supporting farmers and ranchers and working with the agricultural community, as well as the federal government, to support B.C. producers. New programs are being created to help farmers find more hay and feed for their animals.

Actions and Investments

- Offering targeted advance payments for cattle producers to address immediate cash-flow challenges, feed shortages and more expensive feed prices due to the 2023 drought, in partnership with the federal government under Agristability 2023.
- Working in partnership with the B.C. Cattlemen's Association to deliver a new Access to Feed program that is helping farmers and ranchers affected by drought conditions in the summer of 2023 to find feed for their livestock.
 - The province also approved changes to crop insurance to allow producers to write off grain and oilseed crops that were converted into livestock feed in response to drought conditions.

BUYBC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

BuyBC is a long-standing and successful B.C. government marketing initiative that was developed decades ago to create awareness and visibility for B.C. food producers, help increase sales of local food and beverage products, and strengthen the province's food economy.

Unfortunately, despite a long track record of delivering results and strong support from industry, government abandoned this affordable and effective branding initiative for more than a decade, until it was relaunched under new provincial leadership in 2017.

Since the relaunch, hundreds of B.C. businesses have benefited from enhanced visibility, new partnerships with retailers and improved sales for thousands of products.

Actions and Investments

- Since the relaunch of BuyBC, more than 800 B.C. businesses have registered to use the Buy BC logo to promote approximately 3,900 B.C. food and beverage products.

FOOD PROCESSING GROWTH FUND

When companies add value to agricultural products through processing, it supports more jobs and economic activity, strengthening agricultural communities.

Recognizing this, government is taking action to help B.C. food- and beverage-processing businesses increase productivity and competitiveness through a new Food Processing Growth Fund.

Actions and Investments

- Established businesses will be able to access grants of between \$50,000 and \$1 million for upgrades, such as new or expanded production and storage facilities, the use of robotics and other technology, new product development and commercialization, and other areas through the new \$20-million Food Processing Growth Fund.
- Development of a \$2-million Small Processor Scale-up program to support smaller and less-established food processors and abattoirs.



ENCOURAGING AGRITECH

The B.C. agritech sector is a network of investors, researchers and businesses – advancing opportunity by advancing and adopting technology solutions that respond to challenges such as climate change and food security – issues faced worldwide.

British Columbia is home to more than 150 agritech companies, with the largest companies employing more than 100 people. Most of these companies are still located in the Lower Mainland region, but encouraging the expansion of this important sector into rural and Interior communities is a key opportunity to drive economic growth in these regions. Successful companies such as TechBrew, based in Salmon Arm, are leading the way in showing the possibilities for agritech to drive opportunity in communities of all sizes.

Actions and Investments

- Created the B.C. Centre for Agritech Innovation to position the province as a world leader in agricultural technology and encourage the growth of this key sector in 2022.
 - The centre is bringing together academia, government and industry partners to create more productive, diverse and resilient food systems.
 - The centre is focusing on developing, testing and piloting solutions to the agricultural problems people are facing today in simulated and real-world environments to be farm-ready for commercialization.
 - It is being funded by as much as \$6.5 million over three years from the province while the federal government is providing as much as \$10 million over five years through Pacific Economic Development Canada.





TECHBREW

Finding ways to automate repetitive, labour-intensive, delicate and time-critical activities so they can be completed faster and more accurately is a key opportunity to improve agricultural yields while lowering costs, and TechBrew, in Salmon Arm, is at the forefront of solutions.

The company has been working on robots that can automatically harvest fresh mushrooms when they are ready, helping prevent the spread of pathogens and reduce labour costs while delivering a high-quality product.

The B.C. Agritech Grant is helping the company evolve their automated mushroom-picking technology so it's ready for a larger portion of the market in Europe.

FOOD SECURITY

Access to high-quality, healthy food is critical for families. As food costs rise worldwide because of supply chain issues, global inflation and climate disasters, improving food security is important, especially for people living in small, remote and First Nations communities, where food costs are already highest.

Actions and Investments

- Working to improve access to affordable food, particularly in small, remote and First Nations communities through the new \$20-million Food Affordability and Innovation Fund with investments in projects to strengthen supply chains, connect producers to people and prevent food waste with improvements to food-storage facilities and transportation links.
- Starting the Feed B.C. partnership program to connect hospitals, care homes, schools and other government facilities to local food producers, multiplying community benefits and making critical services less vulnerable to supply-chain disruptions and wild price fluctuations due to world market conditions.
- Working with First Nations communities to use traditional foods to address rising food costs, mitigate climate change and unlock local opportunities in the agriculture and food economy.
 - B.C. is investing \$30 million in building and strengthening distinct Indigenous food systems, including the revitalization of traditional production, harvest and preservation practices.
- Promoting food security while helping hazelnut, grape, berry and tree-fruit producers become more competitive, resilient and environmentally sustainable with a new \$15-million Perennial Crop Renewal Program. This cost-shared program has three streams:
 - Sector-development projects – 100 per cent of costs for perennial food crop industry associations/sector stakeholder groups
 - Removal projects – a flat per-acre rate that is expected to cover 100 per cent of costs for perennial food crop producers farming in B.C.
 - Planting projects – 75 per cent of nursery plant and crop support system costs for perennial food crop producers farming in B.C.

UNLOCKING NEW OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE LEGAL CANNABIS INDUSTRY

Craft breweries, wineries, distilleries and cannabis producers are part of the tourism industry and contribute to the economy of rural and Interior communities.

Breweries, wineries and distilleries, and cannabis producers contributed \$3.1 billion to B.C.'s GDP in 2022. Over past five years, the three industries have contributed an average of \$2.8 billion each year.

Over time, changes to liquor laws have allowed small breweries and wineries to thrive throughout B.C., in part through policies that help them diversify their revenue streams and reach customers directly.

Work is continuing to grow a strong legal craft cannabis industry in B.C. with targeted changes in policy to support participation of small craft producers and ongoing work to identify opportunities to strengthen this burgeoning industry.

Building a strong craft cannabis industry is key to moving customers into the legal market, eliminating the illicit market, and creating economic opportunities throughout B.C.

Actions and Investments

- Launching the B.C. Indigenous Cannabis Product program to highlight cannabis products from B.C.-based Indigenous producers.
- Enabling farm-to-gate sales of cannabis products by launching the Producer Retail Store licence in November 2022.
- Making targeted policy changes to better reflect the needs of craft producers, such as temporarily amending supplier payment terms to support cash flow, permanently eliminating recall and product contamination insurance to lower operational costs and allowing small-scale producers to deliver directly to licensed cannabis retailers across the province.
- Working to identify further opportunities to strengthen the craft cannabis industry in line with policies that enable hospitality and agri-tourism experiences, allowing cannabis cultivators new ways to engage customers and build more diverse and resilient revenue streams.



CHRISTINA LAKE CANNABIS

Christina Lake Cannabis is the biggest employer in Christina Lake, a community of nearly 1,100 people in the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary. The company produces pesticide-free, outdoor-grown cannabis on a 13-hectare property.

Revitalizing and renewing resource industries

Resource industries have long been an important part of the economy of rural, Interior and coastal communities, and in a world looking for sustainably produced resources, these industries will long continue to anchor local economies in B.C.

There is an exciting story to tell about resource industries in B.C. A story of people coming together to change the way things have always been. A story of governments, businesses and communities doing things differently. A story of moving together with First Nations to advance development where it is welcome, and working hand-in-hand to protect the watersheds and landscapes people cherish and communities need.

When the B.C. Legislative Assembly unanimously passed the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, it put the province on the path to new opportunities built on respectful relationships and opportunities that reflect the needs and aspirations of First Nations and benefit people in the communities closest to resource development.

Resource industries in B.C. have an important role to play in producing the critical resources the world needs, including the resources we need to address, adapt to and mitigate climate change.

As we move toward a brighter future for rural, remote and Interior and First Nations communities, it's critical to revitalize and renew resource industries to be responsive, competitive and reflective of the realities we face today.

That means finding ways to make resources work harder for communities by unlocking innovation and adding value through products such as manufactured wood. And by making sure First Nations and people in nearby communities get a fair share of the benefits generated by natural-resource development close to home.

Investments in infrastructure such as high-speed connectivity, good highways and workforce housing are key to revitalizing and renewing traditional industries. So is working to improve permitting and other government processes to help good projects move forward faster.

Actions and Investments

- Improving the clarity and speed of natural-resource permitting to help reduce backlogs, increase certainty, move good projects forward and support further electrification and connectivity in rural, remote and First Nations communities.
 - This initiative, and wider work to modernize the permitting system, is being advanced through a \$77-million investment in Budget 2023.



SUSTAINABLE MINING FOR A CLEAN AND SECURE FUTURE

British Columbia is a leading mining jurisdiction and is working to provide the critical minerals the world needs to build a low-carbon future.

B.C.'s mining sector is an essential part of this change as we provide the critical minerals and metals needed to fight climate change. We are the country's largest producer of copper and only producer of molybdenum. These and other critical minerals are key to manufacturing the electric vehicles and renewable energy infrastructure we need to create a cleaner, healthier future.

Actions and Investments

- Developing a Critical Minerals Strategy to develop and leverage opportunities to mine the minerals needed to build electric vehicles, wind turbines, solar power and a cleaner future for everyone.
 - This strategy is being supported with \$6 million through Budget 2023.
- Working in collaboration with South Korea to support mining innovation, promote trade and drive investment in B.C.'s mining sector.

ARTEMIS GOLD'S BLACKWATER MINE

Developed in partnership between Artemis Gold, the Lhoosk'uz Dené Nation, Ulkatcho First Nation and Carrier Sekani First Nations, with the participation of communities in the area, the Blackwater Mine is a role model in a thriving, future-focused mining sector. It received its operating permit in just 10 months after final application acceptance.

The mine site is located within the territories of Lhoosk'uz Dené Nation and Ulkatcho First Nation. They have been engaged in all aspects of the

project, from exploration, to permitting, to environmental assessment. The mine's owners and both First Nations have a project participation agreement in place, and through an agreement with the province, Lhoosk'uz Dené and Ulkatcho First Nations also share in mineral tax revenue from the project.

Connection to the BC Hydro grid will provide the mine with a sustainable source of low-carbon hydroelectricity and the potential to produce gold and silver with some of the lowest greenhouse gas emissions in the world.

A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR FORESTRY

The forest industry in B.C. is in the midst of a difficult transition. The timber supply has shrunk, especially in the Interior, primarily due to mountain pine beetle infestation, but also due to unprecedented forest fires, inadequate land-use planning and stalled replanting efforts by previous governments, unfair softwood lumber tariffs at the border, and the unchecked export of raw logs.

There is also growing recognition that timber harvesting has to co-exist with businesses that depend on thriving forests, such as ecotourism and non-timber harvesting, as well as important values such as protecting watersheds and ecosystems for generations to come.

Another important factor that is driving change in this industry is our shared recognition that First Nations' rights to manage and benefit from the resources in their territories must be respected.

There is a brighter future for forestry on the horizon, but it doesn't involve going back to the failed policies of the past. Working together with First Nations, industry and communities, we can create new opportunities to manufacture cutting-

edge products that can be supported with a sustainable harvest.

The BC Manufacturing Jobs Fund is one of the tools we've put in place to put us on the path to that future. This \$180-million fund is already on track to create new jobs and new opportunities in Williams Lake, where Massive Canada is building a new mass-timber production plant with support from the province.

We're also investing in the future of forestry by researching and developing innovative practices to strengthen forest resiliency, ecosystem health and climate adaptation, while continuing work to replant and restore forest lands throughout B.C.

Recognizing that it will take time to transition the forest industry to stability and sustainability, government is taking care of people today with forest worker supports that are helping people retrain, retire early and find new opportunities.

However, government's priority is to keep people working in the industry and to do that, we collaborate with companies to innovate and create new and sustainable opportunities.

Actions and Investments

- Helping create more than 70 long-term family-supporting jobs in Williams Lake with a \$10-million investment in Massive Canada's new mass-timber-based modular-housing production facility.
 - This investment was made possible by the BC Manufacturing Jobs Fund, which was doubled to \$180 million in Budget 2023.
 - The BC Manufacturing Jobs Fund supports established for-profit organizations to plan and launch high-value industrial and manufacturing projects that deliver direct benefits and stable, family-supporting jobs.
 - The fund is designed to help industries become more sustainable and create more value for communities by reorienting around producing higher value products such as mass timber and other advanced bio-products.

- The province is proposing a provincewide adoption of mass-timber requirements in new building construction to help accelerate the implementation of mass-timber projects.
- \$50 million for the Forest Enhancement Society of BC to prevent and mitigate wildfire impacts to communities while getting fire damaged wood to pulp and paper mills where it can provide benefits to people, communities and the economy.
- Working to turn forest waste into bio-economy jobs by introducing a Coastal Fibre Recovery Zone with stricter waste benchmarks and penalties.
- Researching and developing innovative practices to strengthen forest resiliency, ecosystem health and climate adaptation, including selective harvesting approaches and habitat restoration, with a \$10-million investment in the Silviculture Innovation Fund as part of Budget 2023.
- Planted well over one billion trees between 2018 and 2021.
 - Healthy forests and sustainable forestry are critical in the global fight against climate change.
 - B.C. is leading the country in its science-based reforestation efforts and has planted more than 1.6 billion trees since 2017, including wildfire recovery work where, in 2023 alone, we are planting more than 40 million trees in areas affected by recent wildfires.
- Supporting forest workers affected by changing industry conditions.
 - Government is delivering a suite of supports for people affected by weakening markets and changes in the forest sector.
 - This includes skills training, short-term employment opportunities and employment assistance, and retirement transition support for workers who are 55 or older.
 - It also includes our \$33-million Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program (REDIP) fund, which is supporting projects that promote economic diversification, resilience, clean-growth opportunities and infrastructure development. More than 200 projects were approved for funding from REDIP's first intake that will make a positive impact for people and communities.
- Working toward greater certainty of where sustainable harvesting can occur while continuing to protect other values through new Forest Landscape Planning Tables.
 - These tables are bringing together First Nations, scientists and forestry experts to identify wider forest values and threats to forest health.
 - The province accelerated this work with \$21 million in Budget 2023 to establish more Forest Landscape Planning Tables throughout the province.

Developing world-class tourism experiences

Tourism is a critical part of the economy of rural B.C. People come from all over the world for incredible wilderness experiences, wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing and cultural activities that can only be found in rural and remote parts of the province.

The past three years have been incredibly difficult for people throughout the tourism industry. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all domestic and international travel was put on hold, leaving workers and business owners struggling to make a living. And now, with rising costs from global inflation stretching family budgets, many people locally are reducing the amount they spend on local trips and other activities that keep tourism businesses going, especially during the off seasons.

Together, these factors mean many tourism businesses are still working to get back to where they were in 2019. Recognizing this, the province is continuing to take action to bolster and develop world-class tourism experiences in rural communities and throughout the province.

Actions and Investments

- Over the past three years, the B.C. government has supported the tourism sector with more than \$500 million in tourism support, including:
 - More than \$300 million to support tourism business recovery.
 - \$154 million in community-based tourism infrastructure for recovery to create jobs and spur economic development.
 - More than \$17 million to support Indigenous tourism in B.C., one of the fastest-growing sectors of the industry.
 - \$36.8 million to more than 80 major anchor attractions and tour bus operators.
 - \$30 million in 2021 to support 682 fairs, festivals and events in 134 communities throughout B.C., and another \$30 million in February 2023 to support 1,172 events in 184 communities.
 - \$4.75 million for fixed costs to help large accommodation providers, and tenure and park permit holders.
- Preserving and enhancing outdoor recreational opportunities in BC Parks and outdoor recreation sites and trails with \$101 million in operating and capital funding over the Budget 2023 fiscal plan.



SUPPORT FOR FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

Events, fairs and festivals bring people together, support a vibrant and thriving tourism industry, and provide important opportunities to build and strengthen community, especially in rural regions of the province.

Since 2020, many of these important community events have struggled to find their footing again. Loss of staffing and volunteers because of the break in operations, global inflation, supply-chain issues, and audiences that are not fully returning to indoor events, are making it more challenging than ever to continue hosting fairs, festivals and other community activities.

Recognizing this, government is providing grants to cover as much as 20 per cent of the cost of these important events, up to a maximum of \$250,000 per event.

Actions and Investments

- Providing as much as \$250,000 per event for eligible arts, culture and sporting activities, community celebrations, fall fairs and rodeos through the B.C. Fairs, Festivals and Events Fund.
 - 1,845 events received support from the B.C. Fairs, Festivals and Events Fund between 2021 and 2023 as a result of the province's investment:
 - 908 arts and cultural events;
 - 540 sport events;
 - 308 community celebrations and gatherings;
 - 90 agricultural fairs, exhibitions and rodeos; and
 - eight other types of events.

THE FALKLAND STAMPEDE

In March 1919, that first spring after the end of First World War, the people of Falkland, B.C., gathered in a celebration that was to become the first Falkland Stampede.

Ever since that day, the Falkland Stampede has brought people together in a shared love and celebration of the good things in life – the outdoors, good clean competition, and ice cream.

One of the top 12 biggest pro rodeos in Canada, it has been hosting professional competitions since 1969 and is affectionately known by many as the biggest little rodeo in Canada.

The Falkland Stampede is one of many events and community celebrations that received support to continue tourism attractions and long-held traditions as part of the B.C. Fairs, Festivals and Events Fund in 2023.

Clean waters and abundant fisheries

Clean water, riparian areas and coastal ecosystems are critical to the economies of rural communities. They deliver the safe drinking water that people rely on, protect and mitigate against natural disasters and support a wide variety of fisheries.

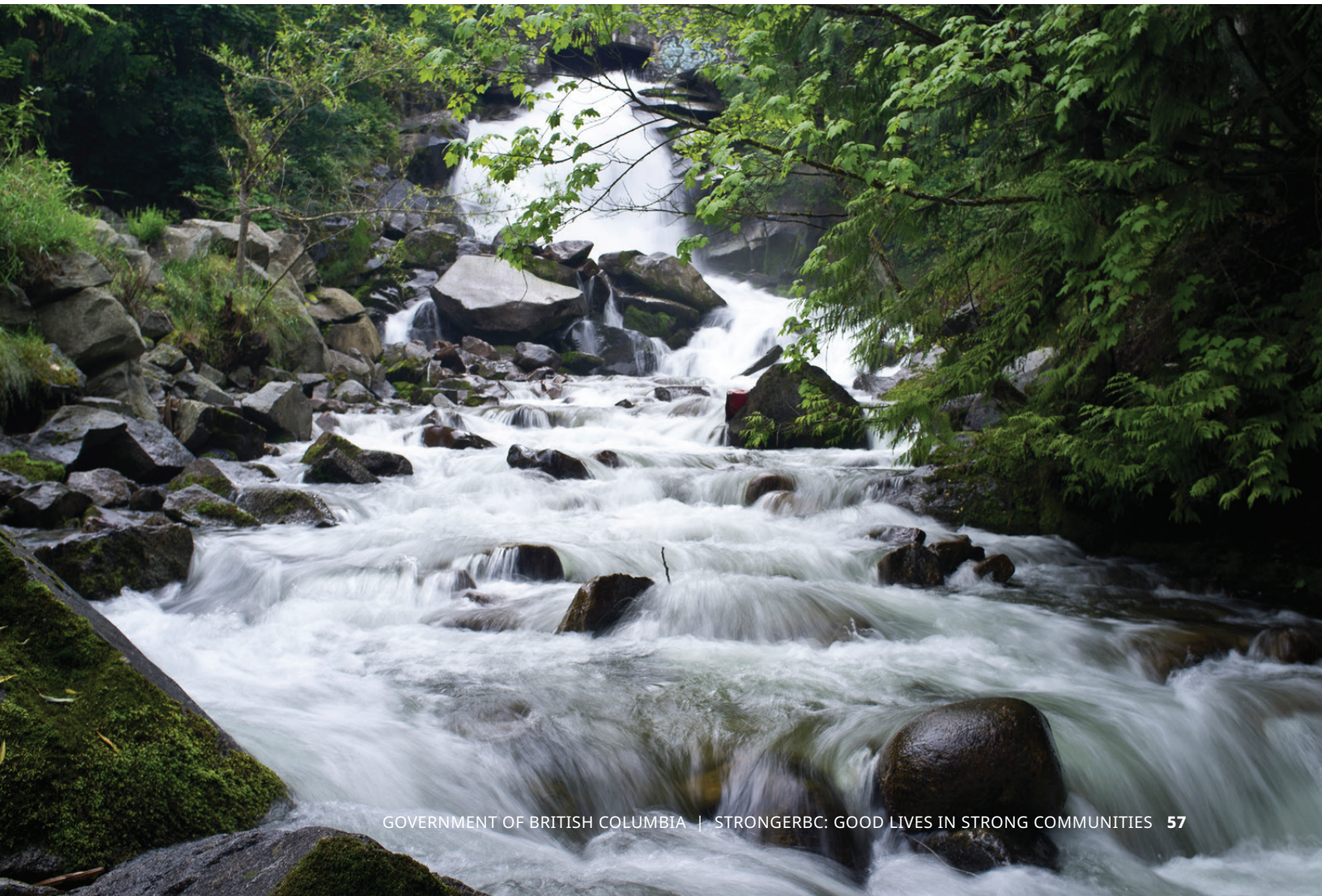
Abundant fisheries create strong foundations for diverse economies. Geoduck, urchin, spot prawns, salmon, herring roe, crab, scallops, clams, mussels and halibut are just some of the many high-value seafoods that rely on a clean B.C. coast to thrive. Each fishery has its own seasons, ways of harvesting and processing, and eager customers here and overseas.

As part of building a strong future for people in B.C., we're investing in projects that will safeguard clean drinking water, protect watersheds, restore ecosystems and provide a strong basis for the recovery of key species, such as salmon, that are struggling.

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER TO SUPPORT WILD SALMON RECOVERY

Just like salmon connect salty ocean waters to the rivers and lakes of the Interior, they also bring people in B.C. together. Wherever wild salmon are, they support strong traditions, ecosystems and economies.

Salmon are important to First Nations, who have food, social and ceremonial harvesting rights. It's



also a critical staple in the cupboard or freezer for many families in rural B.C., especially in remote communities where food can be more costly and difficult to access.

Salmon also supports a vibrant tourism industry, with people coming to B.C. from all over the world to experience reeling in a feisty chinook or tempting a steelhead to strike from the shallows of a river with a well-cast fly.

And salmon are also critical to the commercial fishery, which supplies most B.C. families with the salmon they eat and provides jobs in harvesting for people in many rural and coastal communities.

Many populations of salmon in B.C. have declined over the past few decades. The reasons for this are complex and not always fully known.

What we do know is all who rely on salmon – whether for food, for social and ceremonial reasons, or for work – have a shared interest in seeing these incredible fish return to the rivers they were born in for countless generations to come.

As part of making sure that happens, the province is investing in wild-salmon restoration projects throughout B.C.

Actions and Investments

- Supporting the recovery of salmon stocks that are in decline by creating and strengthening the B.C. Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund in partnership with the federal government.
 - Launched in 2019, the province and federal government doubled their support for wild salmon recovery in 2022, bringing the total funding available to address climate-change impacts to salmon, restore priority salmon populations, and bolster Indigenous participation in salmon restoration to \$285.7 million.
- Supporting additional salmon habitat protection and restoration projects with a \$17.25-million grant to the First Nations Fisheries Council and the Pacific Salmon Foundation in 2023.

KUS-KUS-SUM RESTORATION

There was once a village named Kus-Kus-Sum along the Courtenay River. Nearby, on the northern side of the river, where it meets the K'ómoks Estuary, were the burial grounds where people from this village laid their loved ones to rest.

In the late 1940s, trees were cleared from this site so a sawmill could be built and later, in the 1970s, much of the marsh between the Courtenay River and Comox Road was filled in by the mill's

owners, destroying important habitat for salmon and weakening the integrity of the watershed.

Since 2018, K'ómoks First Nation, Project Watershed and the City of Courtenay have worked in partnership to restore this important area with support and funding from the province. This work to restore the K'ómoks Estuary, funded by the Healthy Watersheds Initiative through StrongerBC, illustrates how protecting and enhancing watersheds can advance reconciliation and bring people together in a shared vision of a stronger, more abundant and healthier future.

PROTECTING WATERSHEDS FOR GENERATIONS TO COME

Healthy watersheds provide clean water to ecosystems and communities and reduce the risks and impacts of floods, droughts and wildfires. As our climate changes, and weather becomes more extreme and unpredictable, it's more important than ever to work together to restore watersheds and make them more resilient.

Watersheds are the lifeblood of B.C. and for too long not enough has been done to protect them. The province is changing that by working with First Nations to co-develop a watershed security strategy that will safeguard watersheds for today and future generations. Flowing from and complementing the strategy, a new Watershed Security Fund is providing the resources needed to continue the work done to restore rivers and wetlands, provide spawning grounds for salmon and protect aquatic ecosystems and the animals and plants that rely on them through StrongerBC's Healthy Watersheds Initiative.

It's been estimated that as many as 48,000 people in B.C. have jobs that rely on watersheds, many of them in rural B.C. where most of the province's watersheds are. Together, watersheds in B.C. are estimated to generate \$5 billion in economic activity each year. This makes protecting and enhancing watersheds integral to our vision of a strong economic future for rural communities.

Actions and Investments

- Actualizing reconciliation, preparing for climate change, and protecting the clean water that people and ecosystems rely on by co-developing a Watershed Security Strategy with First Nations.
- Creating jobs, promoting food security and safeguarding the well-being of communities into the future with a \$100-million Watershed Security Fund.
 - This investment is in addition to the \$30 million provided to launch the fund as part of Budget 2022.
 - The fund also builds on work done to restore rivers and wetlands, create spawning grounds for salmon and expand protection for aquatic species as part of the Healthy Watersheds Initiative, which was developed and delivered with a \$27-million investment as part of the StrongerBC economic plan.
- Creating jobs while cleaning up plastics and other pollution from coastlines with an additional \$25-million investment in the Clean Coast, Clean Waters Initiative Fund in 2023.
 - Previous projects have removed derelict vessels and cleaned up marine debris from more than 4,600 kilometres of shoreline, while creating more than 1,700 good jobs in coastal communities.

Conclusion

During the coming decades, we can expect to face new challenges and encounter new opportunities that aren't in our sights today. By levelling up services, connectivity and economic development throughout the province today, we're positioning ourselves to embrace opportunity and overcome whatever difficulties come our way.

The actions outlined in this document are a cross-section of government's work to reverse more than a decade and a half of under-investment in rural, Interior, coastal and First Nations communities, positioning them for a brighter future. Despite the breadth and scope of the actions outlined in these

pages, they still only represent a part of the work government is doing to make lives better for people in every part of the province.

Our vision of a bright future – where people can build good lives in strong communities in every part of B.C. – is backed by these actions. As we reckon with the challenges before us – the hazards of accelerating climate change, global inflation and changing global market realities – it has never been clearer that our best bet is to stick together. People in communities of all sizes, in every region, deserve to thrive, and when they do, it benefits every one of us and the province as a whole.





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