

MEDIA RELEASE

COVID-19 critically complicates the existing challenges people with intellectual disabilities face in accessing health care

Special Olympics BC has challenged all 2020 election candidates to commit to ending deadly inequality

People with intellectual disabilities have been severely marginalised and suffered alarming health outcomes for their whole lives. But now, like everyone else, they are battling the additional complications and concerns caused by COVID-19.

Health care professionals may not know how to communicate with people with intellectual disabilities about COVID-19 prevention and symptoms. Many individuals with intellectual disabilities have trouble expressing their health concerns. Many health professionals have not received specific training, or are not familiar enough with this population, to know the best questions to ask to draw out the issues. Because of these hurdles, critical health conditions can be missed.

[Please click here](#) to listen to Special Olympics BC Director and Past President Grenville Finch-Noyes. His sister Charmian, an early Special Olympics athlete in Ontario, died of undiagnosed cervical cancer when she was 47 years old.

The barriers people with intellectual disabilities face in the health system matter now more than ever with COVID-19. They can mean the difference between life and death.

It is time for B.C.'s elected officials to step forward and create essential and lasting change. The findings from other jurisdictions are too severe to ignore. Among them:

- Obesity is found in children with intellectual disabilities at rates 2 to 3 times that observed in typically developing children.
- Individuals with intellectual disabilities experience two to three times more preventable hospitalizations than the general population.
- 50 per cent of individuals with intellectual disabilities are dispensed multiple medications concurrently, with 22 per cent being dispensed five or more concurrently.
- 44 per cent of adults with intellectual disabilities have had a mental illness diagnosis over a two-year period.
- 34.3 per cent of women with intellectual disabilities were screened for cervical cancer, compared to 66.8 per cent of their peers.
- Among children with a disability, between 39 and 68 per cent of female children and 16 and 30 per cent of male children will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday.

Special Olympics BC has issued a call to all candidates in the 2020 election to commit to engaging with people with intellectual disabilities and their supporters, to work together to end these deadly and unacceptable health conditions.

Find more data and the candidates' responses:

www.specialolympics.ca/british-columbia/2020-election-challenge