



2026 - 2027 Policies & Positions Manual



INTRODUCTION

The BC Chamber of Commerce is the province's largest and most broadly based business network, representing more than 80 local Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade and tens of thousands of businesses of every size, sector, and region across British Columbia.

The 2026 - 2027 Policies and Positions Manual contains 33 policy resolutions adopted by members during the policy session at the BC Chamber's 74th Annual General Meeting and Conference, held on June 2, 2025, in Fort St. John.

Our mission is to empower business communities across British Columbia, and working alongside local chambers and boards of trade is central to that work. The policy process is one of the primary ways the BC Chamber listens to and represents business communities across the province. These member-driven resolutions reflect the realities, challenges, and opportunities emerging from every corner of British Columbia. They help identify shared priorities and guide the work we undertake together - connecting businesses, sharing insights, and advocating for the interests of business communities across the province.

The BC Chamber supports the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and respects Indigenous rights and interests in British Columbia. The policy resolutions within this manual are member-driven and are not intended to insert the BC Chamber into government-to-government discussions. While some proposals may have benefited from Indigenous input, they do not imply third-party endorsement unless explicitly stated. As our network advances on its reconciliation journey, we remain committed to continuously improving this policy process.

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SECTION I: POSITIONS ON SELECT PROVINCIAL POLICIES

ELIMINATING THE 50-50 RULE TO STRENGTHEN FOOD SECURITY AND AGRIFOOD PROCESSING IN B.C.

Issue

British Columbia's 50-50 rule restricts food processors operating in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) from achieving year-round operations, stifling innovation, investment, and local food security. Modernizing this rule is essential to strengthening B.C.'s resilience against climate disruptions, geopolitical instability, and global supply chain pressures.

Background

Today's global food system is under increasing strain from climate change, geopolitical instability, and persistent labour shortages. These pressures underscore the need for a more resilient and sustainable local food supply. B.C.'s reliance on long global supply chains not only increases vulnerability but contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, with food systems accounting for up to 30% of global emissions.¹

The 50-50 rule requires processors on ALR land to source at least half of all inputs from the same property. While designed to protect farmland, this rule creates significant barriers to scaling agrifood processing. In practice, this rule restricts processors from operating year-round when local crops are out of season, limits their ability to adapt to seasonal variation, and prevents the formation of efficient supply chains.

In an era of climate volatility, geopolitical instability, and trade uncertainty, modernizing this framework is essential to strengthen farm incomes, expand local processing capacity, and enhance B.C.'s food security.

As a result of this rule, B.C. has already lost millions in AgTech and food production investment to more flexible jurisdictions, such as Alberta. Entire commodity processing sectors, including potato and pea processing, have shifted operations out of province due to regulatory inflexibility.² Public support for expanding food production and processing on ALR land is strong. Recent polling shows that more than 73% of British Columbians support maximizing agricultural output and increasing local processing capacity to strengthen food security.³

Modernizing land-use regulations can unlock more than \$1 billion in food processing investment while reducing reliance on the United States for essential food products.⁴ The current rule forces some growers to ship crops to the U.S. for processing, only to re-import them at higher cost, undermining both economic and climate goals. This also increases emissions related to unnecessary food transportation.

Allowing processors to supplement local inputs with out-of-province ingredients would enable continuous operations, provide a consistent food supply, enhance food security, and attract investment in AgTech and food processing.

Reforming the 50-50 rule would support farming incomes and strengthen the economy while aligning with the federal government's target of doubling non-U.S. trade and B.C.'s goal to increase agricultural exports by 25%.

¹ <https://www.unido.org/stories/new-research-shows-food-system-responsible-third-global-anthropogenic-emissions>

² <https://www.boardoftrade.com/files/advocacy/2025-building-bc/building-bc-2025.pdf>

³ <https://researchco.ca/2025/09/03/alr-bc/>

⁴ The \$1 billion figure reflects commercially sensitive data provided by companies interested in investing or expanding in British Columbia.

Consideration of Soil Quality and Land Classification

Some stakeholders caution that not all ALR land should be treated equally.

Critics suggest that soils Class 1 and 2 should remain primarily dedicated to traditional crop production, while lower-quality land could be prioritized for value-added processing.

This approach mirrors the “Green Heart” concept in the Netherlands, where central high-quality farmland is protected for food production while surrounding areas allow more flexible agricultural use. Including soil-based safeguards would ensure modernization strengthens the ALR without compromising the most productive land.

The Premier’s 2019 Food Security Task Force report⁵ echoed this, recommending an opportunity to modernize the ALR by allocating lower quality agricultural land (soil type 4-7), equating to approximately 0.25% of the province’s Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) for agricultural-industrial use.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Eliminate the 50-50 rule to enable year-round, scalable food processing on ALR land.
2. Establish clear approval pathways for food processing on low-quality farmland to unlock economic investment.
3. Collaborate with industry and municipal governments to ensure regulatory certainty and investment competitiveness.
4. Continue to protect high quality farmland, especially Class 1 and 2 soil.

⁵ P. 12 <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/121/2020/01/FSTF-Report-2020-The-Future-of-Food.pdf>

ENSURING CONSISTENT AGRITOURISM POLICY IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS BRITISH COLUMBIA TO STRENGTHEN RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Issue

Agritourism operators across British Columbia face significant barriers due to inconsistent interpretation and enforcement of provincial agritourism policy by municipalities and regional districts. Although the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) provides a provincial framework intended to support diversified farm income, local governments apply these rules unevenly – with some permitting agritourism activities such as farm stays, RV sites, educational programs, and small-scale events, while others prohibit the same activities under identical provincial policy.

These inconsistencies create substantial economic uncertainty. Operators cannot reliably plan or invest when the same agritourism structure or activity may be permitted in one jurisdiction and prohibited in another. Businesses report sudden changes in interpretation, inconsistent enforcement between jurisdictions, and unclear or contradictory guidance from local authorities. They also report lost revenue, cancelled projects, and sudden enforcement changes that undermine long-term viability. This unpredictability limits rural economic development and discourages the diversification that agritourism is intended to support.

Background

Agritourism is an essential driver of rural economic development in British Columbia, supporting farm viability, tourism activity and diversified local economies. Provincial frameworks established by the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) and the Ministry of Agriculture outline permitted agritourism activities on Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) land, with the intent of providing clarity, consistency and opportunities for farms to supplement income through tourism-related offerings.

However, municipalities and regional districts are responsible for interpreting and implementing these provincial frameworks through local bylaws, permitting systems, and enforcement practices. In practice, this has resulted in significant variation across the province. Some regions apply the ALC framework in a clear, business-friendly manner, while others interpret the same policies far more restrictively, creating uncertainty for operators and limiting rural economic development.

Across the Okanagan, several jurisdictions have adopted transparent and predictable agritourism policies that align with provincial intent. In Vernon, the city has developed distinct agritourism accommodation guidelines that clearly differentiate between dwellings and seasonal farm-stay structures, providing operators with a reliable pathway for compliance. Kelowna, Lake Country, and Summerland similarly provide clear definitions for agritourism accommodations, accessory buildings, and temporary farm structures, reducing confusion and enabling operators to invest confidently in diversified tourism offerings. On the Naramata Bench and in the Penticton area, wineries and farms routinely operate guest suites, cabins, and tasting-room-based experiences under stable, well-communicated policies.

In contrast, other regions apply the same provincial framework far more restrictively. In the Thompson-Nicola region, for example, a rural agritourism operator consulted with a regional inspector and was advised that small agritourism structures would be permitted as long as they remained under a specified square footage and remained temporary. Construction proceeded in full compliance with this guidance. However, following a third-party complaint, the interpretation shifted abruptly. The unplumbed, seasonal “dry cabins” – intended for temporary farm-stay use – were reclassified as “single-family dwellings,” triggering requirements for full residential services, including septic installation, electrical upgrades, and pressure to rezone the ALR, RL-1-zoned, farm-classified property to a commercial designation. Enforcement escalated rapidly, including warrants to access the property, and a formal demand letter.

stated that the structures would be subject to removal if used for agritourism-related stays. This occurred despite the structures meeting the ALC criteria as well as previously communicated criteria by the regional authority. This resulted in a complete shutdown and loss of diverse revenue.

In some cases, regional districts have suggested the use of temporary use permits as an alternative pathway for agritourism accommodations. While this approach may offer short-term relief, it introduces significant uncertainty for operators. Temporary permits are time-limited, subject to renewal discretion, and vulnerable to shifting political or administrative interpretation. As a result, they provide little incentive for long-term investment in infrastructure, marketing, or business development. For agritourism operators seeking to build sustainable, multi-year offerings, reliance on temporary permitting undermines financial viability and discourages responsible capital investment.

Demonstrated pattern of uneven application

Other operators in the Thompson-Nicola region have reported similar challenges. Several farms seeking to offer seasonal agritourism accommodations or small-scale visitor experiences have been informed that they must pursue full commercial zoning – a costly, multi-year process that is inconsistent with the ALC's intent to support on-farm diversification. In some cases, small unplumbed cabins, yurts, or temporary structures intended for short-term farm stays were classified as permanent dwellings, triggering requirements for full residential servicing and building code compliance designed for year-round occupancy. These requirements significantly increase development costs and, in many cases, make agritourism operations economically unfeasible. The result is a widening gap between regions where agritourism is supported as a diversification strategy and regions where inconsistent interpretation effectively prevents it.

This inconsistency is further highlighted by the experience of neighbouring agritourism operators in the same region. For example, nearby farms are permitted to operate multiple small guest structures as farm-stay accommodations under local interpretation. These structures are similar in scale and purpose to those constructed by operators facing restrictive enforcement yet allowed in one case and prohibited in another.

These inconsistencies create significant business barriers. Operators experience disrupted operations, cancelled bookings, and significant revenue loss when interpretations change without warning. The resulting uncertainty also undermines investor and lender confidence, limiting the ability of rural businesses to plan or expand agritourism offerings.

A consistent and transparent regulatory environment is critical for agricultural sustainability and rural economic growth. Clear provincial implementation guidance – supported by aligned local bylaws and collaboration with business organizations – would provide the predictability operators need to invest confidently and contribute fully to rural economic development. These recommendations are not intended to introduce new administrative steps, but to reduce uncertainty and improve consistency within existing processes for both operators and local governments.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Develop and publish clear, province-wide implementation guidelines for agritourism activities on Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) land to reduce inconsistent interpretation and minimize administrative burden for both operators and local governments
2. Include in province-wide policy or guidelines requirement that local government recommendations and decisions on Agricultural Land Reserve applications explicitly demonstrate

how they balanced agricultural land protection with the objectives of supporting economically viable agriculture under the Agricultural Land Commission Act.

3. Require local governments to provide written, publicly accessible rationale for Agricultural Land Reserve-related recommendations, enforcement actions, and interpretation changes, including explanation where similar applications receive materially different treatment.
4. Provide technical assistance, model bylaw templates, and training resources to help local municipalities and regional districts align their zoning, permitting, and enforcement practices with provincial agritourism policy and ALC intent, reducing duplication of effort and improving clarity for staff and operators

PROTECTING B.C.'s CRAFT BREWING INDUSTRY: THE CASE FOR FAIR TAX REFORM

Issue

British Columbia's craft brewing sector has been one of the fastest growing segments of the provincial agri-food and tourism economy over the past two decades. More than 200 craft breweries operate across the province, producing approximately 760,000 hectolitres of beer annually, representing approximately 38 percent of beer manufactured in British Columbia.¹

Craft breweries play a significant role in regional economic development. They create local employment, support agricultural producers and supply chains, attract tourism to rural and urban communities alike, and contribute to the cultural vibrancy of communities throughout the province.

Since 2019, at least 25 craft breweries in British Columbia have closed including 6 closures reported in 2026 to date, the majority of which produced less than 2,000 hectolitres annually.² Economic data also indicates significant profitability challenges within the sector. National financial data suggests 63 percent of breweries with revenues between \$30,000 and \$5 million are not profitable, a range that includes most small and mid-sized craft breweries.³

These pressures are compounded by an outdated provincial beer markup structure. The current markup schedule has remained largely unchanged since 2016, despite significant structural changes in the industry and substantial increases in operating costs.⁴

Under the existing system, small breweries face relatively high starting markup rates while large commercial breweries benefit from preferential rebates. Commercial breweries producing more than 350,000 hectolitres annually receive a rebate of \$60 per hectolitre on the first 50,000 hectolitres produced, representing approximately \$9 million annually in rebates to large brewers operating in British Columbia.⁵

This structure places locally owned breweries at a competitive disadvantage relative to large commercial brewers, which benefit from global purchasing power, economies of scale, and greater capacity to absorb rising operating costs.

Without reform, the sector faces continued brewery closures, job losses, and reduced economic activity in communities across the province. Craft breweries often anchor businesses in smaller communities and tourism destinations, meaning closures can have immediate impacts on local employment, tourism activity, and regional supply chains.

The craft brewing sector also supports a wide network of local suppliers, hospitality businesses, tourism operators, and agricultural producers, meaning that brewery closures can have ripple effects across local economies throughout British Columbia.

Background

In British Columbia, beer is subject to a provincially administered markup applied on a per-litre basis through a tiered system based on annual production volumes. The sector is now facing mounting financial

¹ BC Craft Brewers Guild. *Beer Mark-Up Assessment*. Prepared by MNP LLP, 2025.

² BC Craft Brewers Guild internal industry tracking of brewery closures, referenced in MNP LLP industry assessment.

³ Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada financial performance data referenced in the MNP LLP *Beer Mark-Up Assessment*.

⁴ BC Liquor Distribution Branch. *Manufacturer Markup Schedule and Rebate Structure*, 2016.

⁵ BC Liquor Distribution Branch. *Manufacturer Markup Schedule and Rebate Structure*, rebate applied to the first 50,000 hectolitres of production for large commercial brewers.

pressures. Rising input costs, labour shortages, increased distribution costs, inflationary pressures, and new trade disruptions affecting aluminum and other brewing inputs have placed many breweries under severe financial strain. So, the B.C. Craft Brewers Guild commissioned an economic analysis from MNP LLP to evaluate the impact of modernizing the provincial beer markup structure.

The analysis determined that a revised markup schedule could significantly improve the financial viability of craft breweries while maintaining overall fiscal balance for government. The proposed markup reform introduces a graduated rate structure beginning at \$0.10 per litre for the smallest breweries, gradually increasing across production tiers and extending the highest production threshold from 350,000 hectolitres to 500,000 hectolitres, with a maximum rate of \$1.14 per litre.⁶This revised markup structure would:

- provide financial relief to breweries producing under 15,000 hectolitres annually
- smooth incremental markup increases as breweries grow
- remove structural growth penalties that discourage scaling production
- extend the upper production threshold to better reflect modern industry realities

Under current production levels, the revised structure is estimated to save B.C. craft breweries approximately \$16.3 million annually in markup costs, funds that could be reinvested into operations, employment, and capital investment.⁷ Economic modelling indicates these savings could result in:

- 76 new jobs created within the craft brewing sector
- approximately 48,700 hectolitres of additional production and
- approximately \$29 million in additional industry revenues⁸

The B.C. Craft Brewers Guild is asking the government to review the 2016 beer markup schedule, as it feels the current tiered volume model is outdated and does not reflect current market conditions. Simply put, it starts too high for over 80% of craft beer businesses at 15,000 HL and ends too early at 350,000 HL for three of the world's largest breweries that manufacture in B.C.

By reducing the starting tier to 2,000 HL and increasing the upper threshold to 500,000 HL, the volume scale becomes more gradual and allows small breweries to reinvest savings into their businesses, opens up opportunities for regional breweries to merge, acquire, and grow, and better reflects the volumes of the largest foreign-owned breweries with a more realistic top tier of 500,000 HL.

The craft brewing sector also plays an increasingly important role in tourism development across British Columbia. The B.C. Ale Trail now connects more than 200 brewery destinations across over 70 communities, attracting visitors and supporting local economies throughout the province.⁹

Strengthening the financial viability of breweries supports tourism growth, rural economic development, and job creation across British Columbia.

This recommendation reflects analysis conducted using B.C. Liquor Distribution Branch production and markup data and has been developed in consultation with industry stakeholders. The proposed reform is

⁶ MNP LLP. *BC Craft Brewers Guild Beer Mark-Up Assessment – Revised*, modelling of proposed markup grid.

⁷ MNP LLP modelling of proposed markup reform showing estimated \$16.3 million annual savings to BC craft breweries.

⁸ MNP LLP economic impact modelling estimating 76 jobs created, approximately 48,700 hectolitres of additional production, and approximately \$29 million in additional industry revenue.

⁹ BC Craft Brewers Guild. *Beer Markup Reform Proposal Presentation*, BC Ale Trail tourism data.

designed to maintain overall fiscal balance while modernizing an outdated markup structure that has not been updated since 2016. Increased production and sector growth are also expected to generate additional provincial tax revenues through sales, payroll, and related economic activity.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Modernize the provincial beer markup structure by adopting a revised production-volume markup grid that:
 - a. introduces a lower starting markup rate for small breweries producing under 15,000 hectolitres annually
 - b. smooths incremental markup increases as production levels grow
 - c. extends the highest production threshold from 350,000 hectolitres to 500,000 hectolitres
 - d. modestly increases the top markup tier to maintain overall fiscal balance.

BROADBAND & CONNECTIVITY IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Issue

Rural, remote and Indigenous communities in British Columbia continue to face significant gaps in broadband and cellular connectivity. These gaps undermine economic competitiveness, public safety, climate resilience and access to essential digital services like telehealth, education and e-commerce. Enabling online business is a key strategy for business resiliency, but rural and remote communities throughout B.C. face the added barrier of not having access to reliable broadband infrastructure and connectivity.

Background

Reliable high-speed internet and cellular service form the foundation of B.C.'s modern economy, yet a stark digital divide persists, particularly in rural, northern, First Nations, and resource-dependent regions. As noted in the B.C. Connectivity Report 2024 prepared by the Ministry of Citizens' Services, rural B.C. households face higher gaps, with about 23.5-29.8% lacking access as of 2022-2024 data. The report also notes the government's goal to connect all rural and First Nations households to high-speed internet services by 2027. Connectivity is represented directly in action 4.36 in the Declaration Act Action Plan to ensure every First Nations community in B.C. has access to high-speed internet services

The Government of Canada's Universal Broadband Fund¹ is a \$3.225 billion program designed to expand high-speed Internet access to rural and remote communities, with a goal of delivering reliable speeds of at least 50/10 Mbps across the country. It funds a range of infrastructure projects, including large-scale builds, rapid "shovel-ready" projects, and mobile connectivity improvements particularly for Indigenous communities and underserved areas along highways. While this program represents a significant investment and a critical step toward closing the connectivity gap between urban and rural regions, many communities especially in rural and remote areas of British Columbia and across Canada continue to face limited access, unreliable service, and delays in project delivery. As a result, more work remains to be done to ensure equitable, dependable connectivity that fully supports economic development and essential services such as telehealth, remote work, and online learning.

The COVID-19 crisis exposed gaps as businesses moved online, yet progress has stalled due to rising costs, supply chain delays, and climate-related network damage. Rural businesses still pay two to three times more for service, while cellular dead zones along key routes threaten safety and tourism.

CRTC standards classify broadband (50/10 Mbps) as a basic service, yet over 5% of households—especially in remote areas—remain unserved. Solutions like low-Earth-orbit satellites, 5G fixed wireless, and Indigenous-led networks exist, but provincial funding must focus on last-mile access, affordability, and resilience.

Climate events intensify the need for reliable connectivity, as wildfires and floods isolate communities from alerts and recovery aid. Treating broadband and cellular as essential utilities aligns with federal-provincial goals, but B.C. requires flexible, business-led models beyond federal funding.

If British Columbia wants to grow, diversify, and compete, it needs reliable and affordable digital infrastructure. Broadband and cellular service are no longer optional. They are core economic infrastructure.

¹<https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/high-speed-internet-canada/en/universal-broadband-fund>

Digital connectivity is vital for rural and northern communities to attract investment, grow businesses, support the workforce, and diversify economies. Yet high costs, limited providers, inconsistent service, and weak cellular coverage undermine competitiveness and long-term growth.

Without reliable, scalable, and competitively priced digital infrastructure, rural communities face barriers to workforce attraction, tourism, innovation, and resource development. Broadband and cellular service must be treated as essential economic infrastructure—on par with transportation and utilities—and prioritized as a strategic provincial investment to support B.C.'s economic growth and resilience.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Work in coordination with the federal government and CRTC to accelerate timelines for universal, affordable broadband (CRTC speeds or better) and cellular coverage in all B.C. communities. and surrounding regional areas.
2. Prioritize shovel-ready last-mile projects in rural, remote, and Indigenous areas, including system redundancy in high-risk zones and integration into emergency/climate plans.
3. Mandate open access/wholesale models in funded projects to enable Internet Service Providers competition and affordability commitments for households and SMEs.
4. Reduce the requirement for matching federal dollars on provincially funded projects (including pilot projects), where appropriate, to create a made-in-B.C. solution.
5. Pair infrastructure investments with SME digital and cybersecurity training to maximize economic impact.

BUILDING A CIRCULAR ECONOMY FOR EV BATTERIES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Issue

British Columbia's rapid adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) will generate significant volumes of end-of-life batteries. Without a coordinated strategy to support recycling and second-use applications, the province risks losing valuable critical minerals, and opportunities to extend battery life through energy storage systems (ESS) and other uses. Second-life applications, such as stationary storage, represent a high-value opportunity that should be prioritized alongside recycling. Limited infrastructure, regulatory gaps, and weak market signals constrain circular economy development. Without clear policy direction and workforce readiness, B.C. risks losing economic value and supply chain competitiveness.

Integrating battery recycling and second use into the province's *Look West* strategy is essential to unlock investment, strengthen domestic supply chains, and position B.C. as a global leader in sustainable EV lifecycle management.

Background

B.C. and Canada have been leaders in the transition to electric vehicles, with ambitious targets set for EV adoption. In B.C., the Zero-Emissions Vehicle Act (2019) was amended to reduce the 2035 zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) sales target from 100% to 75%.¹ Similarly, the federal government also recently announced reductions aiming for 75% EV sales by 2035 and 90% by 2040, supported by incentives for battery electric (BEV) and plug-in hybrid vehicles (PHEV).² Globally, EV sales reached over 20 million units in 2025, showcasing strong adoption trends across different markets.³

As EV adoption continues to grow, so does the volume of batteries approaching end-of-life, posing a challenge to managing assets and recovering materials. On average, the lifespan of an EV battery ranges from 10-20 years,⁴ with degradation improving from 2.3% per year in earlier models to 1.8% today.⁵ Extreme conditions, like Northern B.C.'s cold climate, or Interior B.C.'s heatwaves, can further reduce range and accelerate the need for effective lifecycle management.⁶ To safely and efficiently process these batteries and capture full lifecycle value, B.C. will require strategically located infrastructure, such as dismantling facilities, collection hubs, diagnostic centres, recovery plants, and new transportation standards that support a circular economy.

B.C. holds significant potential to lead this sector. Lithium, nickel, cobalt, and manganese are valuable raw materials critical to both the EV and broader clean-technology sectors. Leading manufacturers like Mercedes-Benz have achieved a recovery rate of more than 96% for nickel, cobalt, manganese, and

¹ Government of British Columbia (2025). Updating zero-emission vehicle targets, expanding charging network. Accessed April 2026, https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2026ECS0009-000355#:~:text=Summary%20*%20The%20Province%20is%20amending%20the,projects%20funded%20in%20communiti%20throughout%20British%20Columbia

² Prime Minister of Canada (2026). Prime Minister Carney launches new strategy to transform Canada's auto industry. Accessed February 2026, <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2026/02/05/prime-minister-carney-launches-new-strategy-transform-canadas-auto>

³ Benchmark Mineral Intelligence (2026). Global EV sales reach 20.7 million units in 2025, growing by 20%. Accessed March 2026, <https://source.benchmarkminerals.com/article/global-ev-sales-reach-20-7-million-units-in-2025-growing-by-20>

⁴ BCAA (2023). How long does an electric vehicle battery last? Accessed February 2026, <https://www.bcaa.com/blog/automotive/how-long-does-an-electric-vehicle-battery-last>

⁵ JD Power (2025). How long do electric car batteries last? Accessed February 2026, <https://www.jdpower.com/cars/shopping-guides/how-long-do-electric-car-batteries-last>

⁶ BCAA (2023). How long does an electric vehicle battery last? Accessed February 2026, <https://www.bcaa.com/blog/automotive/how-long-does-an-electric-vehicle-battery-last>

lithium through its battery recycling facility.⁷ Similarly, Hyundai Motor Co. has a dedicated EV battery recycling program, while also partnering with external companies like EcoPro and Lithion to build a global network of technology.⁸ The province's natural resources, skilled workforce, and industrial base create strong foundations for similar success.

The federal government has strategically positioned the nation as a global hub, investing more than \$10 billion through programs such as the Critical Minerals Research, Development and Demonstration (CMRDD) program and the Strategic Innovation Fund,⁹ targeting the full value chain from extraction to recycling. The CMRDD's extension to 2028 will accelerate the scale-up of transformative recycling technologies,¹⁰ while federal agencies like NRCan and ISED prioritize lithium, cobalt, graphite, copper, nickel, and rare earth minerals¹¹ to ensure Canada retains value through domestic processing, not simply the export of raw materials.

However, regulatory uncertainty remains a major barrier. Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) has confirmed that provinces and territories are responsible for end-of-life EV battery management,¹² with batteries currently shipped to recycling facilities in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia, but due to limited domestic processing capacity, a significant portion must still be offloaded to facilities in the United States and Asia.¹³ Offloading batteries to facilities outside of the province not only reduces Canada's ability to capture full economic value and scale a domestic circular supply chain, but it also circumvents second-use applications, such as grid storage systems or industrial repurposing that could extend battery life locally.

In B.C., companies such as Saltworks Technologies are advancing innovative solutions for treating industrial wastewaters and refining lithium,¹⁴ while Moment Energy is repurposing EV batteries to extend battery utility by up to 10 years, effectively enabling a circular battery economy.¹⁵ This growing cluster of electrochemical and clean-tech firms is supported by significant provincial-federal partnerships, including the \$195-million investment in Northwest B.C.'s infrastructure, designed to better connect mining operations with midstream processing and recycling hubs.¹⁶

⁷ Nickel Institute (2025). Critical minerals driving EV performance: a consumer guide to EV batteries - part 1. Accessed February 2026, <https://nickelinstitute.org/en/blog/2025/august/critical-minerals-driving-ev-performance-a-consumer-guide-to-ev-batteries-part-1>

⁸ Ibid, 2025.

⁹ Government of Canada (2022). Impact Report: Strategic Innovation Fund. Accessed February 2026, <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/ised/en/programs-and-initiatives/strategic-response-fund/impact-report>

¹⁰ Government of Canada. Critical Minerals Research, Development and Demonstration Program. Accessed February 2026, <https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/critical-minerals-in-canada/federal-support-for-critical-mineral-projects-and-value-chains/critical-minerals-research-development-and-demonstration-program.html>

¹¹ Government of Canada. Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy. Accessed February 2026, <https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/critical-minerals-in-canada/canadian-critical-minerals-strategy.html#a3>

¹² Alexandra Mae Jones (2025). Canada had big EV battery recycling plans, but without regulations it's the 'Wild West,' expert warns. CBC News. Accessed February 2026, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/climate/ev-battery-recycling-regulation-1.7547790>

¹³ Krista Hessey (2023). How electric vehicles are sparking a battery recycling revolution. Accessed February 2026, <https://globalnews.ca/news/9405696/electric-vehicle-battery-recycling/>

¹⁴ Saltworks. Industrial Water + Lithium. Accessed February 2026, <https://www.saltworkstech.com/>

¹⁵ Moment Energy. Repurposing - Unlock a new revenue stream through EV battery repurposing. Accessed February 2026, <https://www.momentenergy.com/repurpose>

¹⁶ Government of Canada (2024). Canada and B.C. Invest in Infrastructure Upgrades to Support Critical Minerals Development in Northwest B.C. and Create Jobs Across the Province. Accessed February 2026, <https://www.canada.ca/en/natural-resources-canada/news/2024/07/canada-and-bc-invest-in-infrastructure-upgrades-to-support-critical-minerals-development-in-north-west-bc-and-create-jobs-across-the-province.html>

B.C. had previously announced in 2021 that EV batteries would be added to its Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program by 2026, requiring automakers to arrange for battery recycling or reuse.¹⁷ However, the Province has not since advanced that decision, leaving EV batteries outside the EPR framework.¹⁸ This gap contributes to what industry experts call “the Wild West” of EV battery management, where inconsistent oversight and unclear obligations deter investments from the private sector.¹⁹

Meanwhile, industry-led initiatives, such as Quebec’s EV Battery Recovery Program coordinated by Call2Recycle, have demonstrated that organized collection and processing of end-of-life batteries, including reuse, second-life applications, and recycling back into raw materials are achievable.²⁰ Internationally, frameworks like the EU’s Battery Passport (2023) provide a digital system designed to ensure transparency, sustainability, and traceability throughout the entire battery value chain.²¹ This regulation showcases that regulatory certainty can drive investment and innovation.

Without a comprehensive regulatory and economic strategy, B.C. risks:

- Lower recovery rates of critical minerals, limiting domestic supply for EV and clean-technology manufacturing.
- Missed economic value in terms of jobs, investments, battery life, and downstream manufacturing links tied to battery materials.
- Loss of first-mover advantage to jurisdictions with clearer and more advanced regulatory frameworks (e.g. EU, Quebec).
- Investor uncertainty, which slows the development of recycling facilities and circular economy innovations.

A circular EV battery framework could be a cornerstone opportunity within B.C.’s *Look West* Strategy. *Look West* aims to diversify the economy, grow clean-tech and advanced manufacturing sectors, and build a resilient workforce.²² A comprehensive EV battery circular economy strategy directly aligns with these goals by enabling industrial investment, training the next generation of skilled workers, supporting clean growth, and anchoring a new value chain around critical minerals and battery lifecycle management.

Canada’s policy direction is already aligned with these objectives through the federal Critical Minerals Strategy, which identifies circularity, value-added processing, workforce development, and enabling

¹⁷ Government of British Columbia (2021). Advancing Recycling in B.C. Extended Producer Responsibility Five-Year Action Plan, 2021-2026. Page 5. Accessed February 2026, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/waste-management/recycling/recycle/extended_producer_five_year_action_plan.pdf

¹⁸ Government of British Columbia (Last updated 2025). Recycling Regulation: Environmental Management Act - Schedule 3. Accessed February 2026, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/449_2004#Schedule3

¹⁹ Alexandra Mae Jones (2025). Canada had big EV battery recycling plans, but without regulations it’s the ‘Wild West,’ expert warns. CBC News. Accessed February 2026, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/climate/ev-battery-recycling-regulation-1.7547790>

²⁰ Ibid, 2025.

²¹ Hidden Analytical (2025). Powering Transparency: How the EU Battery Passport is Transforming the Battery Industry. Accessed February 2026, <https://www.hiddenanalytical.com/blog/powering-transparency-how-the-eu-battery-passport-is-transforming-the-battery-industry/#:~:text=Powering%20Transparency:%20How%20the%20EU%20Battery%20Passport%20is%20Transforming%20the%20Battery%20Industry&text=The%20European%20Union's%20Battery%20Regulation,global%20benchmark%20for%20sustainable%20manufacturing.>

²² Government of British Columbia (2025). Look West: Jobs and Prosperity for a Stronger BC and Canada. Accessed February 2026, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/employment-business-and-economic-development/look-west-strategy/lookwest.pdf>

infrastructure as national priorities.²³ However, the Strategy's implementation remains uneven, particularly in scaling commercial reuse and recycling capacity and building the infrastructure corridors needed to move critical minerals from extraction sites to processing and end-of-life recovery hubs. The recommendations below serve as practical, industry-aligned mechanisms to operationalize the Strategy and strengthen both British Columbia and Canada's position across the full battery supply chain.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Develop a provincial EV battery recycling and circular economy strategy – establish clear time-bound targets (including recovery rates, second-life utilization rates, and recycled-content requirements), compliance requirements, and performance metrics for the collection, transport, processing, recycling, and second-life applications of end-of-life EV batteries, including regional infrastructure planning and capacity assessments.
2. Integrate EV batteries into the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework – implement mandatory recovery, enforceable reuse, and recycled-content standards for battery producers with reporting requirements and enforcement mechanisms to reduce regulatory uncertainty and support investment in recycling infrastructure.
3. Support workforce and investment development – provide technical training programs for battery reuse, battery recycling, and critical mineral processing and offer financial or regulatory incentives to attract recycling facilities that create local jobs and integrate recovered materials into provincial clean-technology supply chains.
4. Attract private investment in battery recycling and second-use infrastructure – provide incentives and regulatory pathways to support dismantling hubs, collection centres, recovery plants, diagnostic centres, and critical-mineral processing facilities, closing the supply-chain gap and maximizing B.C.'s EV lifecycle value while advancing *Look West* goals.

²³ Government of Canada. Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy. Accessed February 2026, <https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/critical-minerals-in-canada/canadian-critical-minerals-strategy.html#a3>

IMPROVING BC HYDRO PROJECT DELIVERY, TRANSPARENCY, AND SERVICE STANDARDS FOR BUSINESS CUSTOMERS

Issue

With renewed focus on infrastructure, manufacturing, clean energy, and economic resilience in response to international trade pressures, access to timely and reliable electricity is critical to British Columbia's business community. Delays, poor communication, and lack of transparency in BC Hydro's design, permitting, connection, and service processes are causing significant cost overruns, deferred operations, and lost productivity. The Provincial Government and BC Hydro must implement clear service standards, accountability measures, and process improvements to support economic growth.

Background

BC Hydro is a provincial Crown corporation wholly owned by the Government of British Columbia. As the primary provider of electricity infrastructure and grid connection services in British Columbia, BC Hydro plays a central role in enabling commercial, industrial, institutional, and residential development across the province.

In the current economic climate—marked by increased domestic infrastructure investment, supply chain realignment, electrification initiatives, and international trade pressures—timely access to reliable power is more critical than ever. Businesses across multiple sectors, including manufacturing, logistics, technology, resource development, construction, and data infrastructure, require predictable timelines and transparent processes for electrical permitting, upgrades, and new service connections.

However, numerous businesses across British Columbia report systemic challenges in working with BC Hydro, including:

- Long and unpredictable design review timelines
- Limited or inconsistent communication regarding project status
- Changing technical requirements late in the process requiring costly re-engineering
- Lack of clarity regarding connection costs and scheduling
- Delays in energization of completed projects
- Slow response times for service-related issues
- Short-notice changes or cancellations of planned outages
- Communication failures regarding outage notifications

These issues are not isolated to a single region. Businesses operating across multiple communities—including Interior, Lower Mainland, and Northern BC regions—report similar patterns. Commercial and industrial projects often involve hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars in electrical infrastructure investment, and construction projects province-wide represent hundreds of millions of dollars annually requiring BC Hydro coordination.

Delays in permitting, connection approvals, and infrastructure upgrades create significant downstream impacts:

- **Cost Escalation** – Extended construction timelines increase labour, equipment rental, engineering, and financing costs.
- **Deferred Revenue** – Businesses cannot open or expand operations as planned, reducing economic activity and tax generation.
- **Operational Complexity** – Temporary power solutions, transformer rentals, and revised construction sequencing increase risk and expense.

- Investment Uncertainty – Lack of predictable timelines discourages private sector investment in major capital projects.

Businesses with high electrical load requirements—such as manufacturing facilities, large-scale commercial developments, data centres, and clean energy installations—are particularly vulnerable to prolonged design reviews and upgrade delays.

Additionally, coordination between BC Hydro and regulatory bodies, including the BC Energy Regulator, can result in compounded delays for renewable and clean energy projects. In some cases, completed solar installations remain unconnected to the grid for extended periods due to upgrade timing and coordination challenges.

As British Columbia continues to promote electrification, decarbonization, and industrial growth, inefficiencies in grid connection and project execution undermine provincial policy objectives.

Given that BC Hydro operates under provincial jurisdiction and government oversight, improvements to transparency, accountability, service standards, and process efficiency require leadership from the Provincial Government.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Establish and Implement a Formal Customer Service Agreement (CSA):
 - a. Develop, in consultation with stakeholders from commercial, industrial, and institutional sectors, a standardized Customer Service Agreement outlining clear service benchmarks, communication standards, response times, design review timelines, and outage notification protocols.
2. Introduce Transparent Project Timelines and Milestone Reporting:
 - a. Require BC Hydro to provide documented timelines for design review, cost estimation, approvals, construction scheduling, and energization, with mandatory notification and justification for material changes.
3. Implement Accountability and Performance Metrics:
 - a. Establish measurable service delivery KPIs related to permitting timelines, connection approvals, outage communications, and customer responsiveness, with public reporting mechanisms.
4. Streamline Permitting and Inter-Agency Coordination:
 - a. Improve coordination between BC Hydro and other provincial regulatory bodies to reduce duplication, eliminate bottlenecks, and expedite clean energy and infrastructure projects.
5. Develop a Dedicated Commercial & Industrial Project Liaison Program:
 - a. Create specialized teams within BC Hydro to support large or high-load business customers, ensuring consistent points of contact and proactive project management.

LINKING B.C.'S CLEAN ECONOMY TO CANADA'S CRITICAL MINERALS INITIATIVE

Issue

British Columbia plays a strategic, almost irreplaceable role in Canada's Critical Minerals Strategy because of its geology, geography, infrastructure, and global positioning.¹

B.C. is rich in many of the minerals essential for clean technology and advanced manufacturing, including copper (critical for electrification and EVs), molybdenum, nickel, gold, and silver (important for electronics and financial resilience). Copper is especially important, as B.C. is one of Canada's top producers. The province's Pacific coast gives Canada a major advantage in direct shipping routes to other key markets like Japan, South Korea, and China.

In addition, B.C. has an established mining ecosystem, a clean energy advantage, proximity to U.S. supply chains, strong Indigenous partnerships, Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) leadership and untapped mining exploration potential.

Therefore, for B.C., Canada's Critical Minerals Strategy cannot be viewed only as a mining strategy. It is a national industrial and clean-economy strategy designed to build resilient value chains. While equipped with most of the critical minerals the federal government has identified, the province's regional advantage lies in processing, systems integration, commercialization, and services.

The Strategy creates practical, near-term economic opportunities for B.C. businesses, even in the absence of direct mining activity, by focusing on downstream value creation, clean technology, EV systems, and advanced manufacturing.

Background

The Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy is the federal government's long-term roadmap to position Canada as a global supplier of responsibly sourced critical minerals. These essential materials are used in clean technology, digital industries, and modern manufacturing. The Strategy was released in December 2022 with significant federal support behind it and guides decision-making across the entire mineral value chain - from exploration and extraction to processing and recycling - with an aim to grow Canada's competitiveness and secure supply chains for key technologies.²

The Strategy is built around five key objectives that reflect economic, environmental, and social priorities:

1. Supporting Economic Growth, Competitiveness & Job Creation by enhancing industry capacity and investment across value chains.
2. Promoting Climate Action & Environmental Protection by integrating responsible mining with climate commitments and safeguarding ecosystems.
3. Advancing Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, by ensuring Indigenous participation, partnership, and benefit in critical minerals development.
4. Fostering a diverse & inclusive workforce by expanding opportunities and skills training in mining, processing, and related sectors.
5. Enhancing global security & strategic partnerships by strengthening supply chain resilience with allied countries and global partners.

¹ [phase_1_bc_critical_minerals_-_digital.pdf](#)

² Canada's Critical Mineral Strategy: [The Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy - Canada.ca](#)

These objectives are implemented through a whole-of-government approach, involving collaboration with provinces, territories, Indigenous communities, industry leaders, and international partners. The Investment Backbone of the Strategy is backed by nearly \$3.8 billion in federal funding allocated in Budgets 2021-22 to support exploration, processing, innovation, and value chain development.³

This means the biggest opportunities for B.C. are downstream and midstream, where the province already excels:

- Clean technology and applied innovation
- Advanced manufacturing and industrial services
- Engineering, professional services, and logistics
- R&D, testing, commercialization, and scale-up

The following reflects a high-level view of the opportunity for the province:⁴

Sector	Opportunity	Regional Advantage
Clean Technology	Commercialization / Systems	R&D + Applied Innovations
EV Ecosystem	Infrastructure / Services	Urban deployment + fleets
Manufacturing	Advanced components	Skilled labour + proximity
Professional Services	ESG + Finance + Trade	Knowledge Economy
Workforce Dev.	Training and Skills	Post-secondary institutions

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial and Federal Governments:

1. Formally recognize B.C. as a Clean Economy and industrial services region within Canada's Critical Minerals Strategy and adopt a place-based funding model that recognizes regional/provincial economic strengths, rather than one-size-fits-all national strategies and programs.
2. Establish a B.C. SME readiness and matchmaking fund to help small and medium sized businesses enter cleantech, EV, and critical-minerals value chains.
3. Create and expand provincial and federal programs that explicitly support downstream and midstream activities (processing, advanced manufacturing, systems integration, commercialization) in urban centres in the province that are connected to Critical Minerals mining.
4. Institutionalize business advisory input through local organizations such as Chambers, Boards of Trade and business associations in the design and rollout of Clean Economy Programs for SMEs.
5. Accelerate Permitting for Clean Economy Projects.

³ Canada's Critical Mineral Strategy: [The Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy - Canada.ca](#) Burnaby

⁴Board of Trade (BBOT) - Economic Development and Policy Management Unit

REMOVING ENERGY CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS TO UNLOCK ECONOMIC GROWTH IN B.C.

Issue

Insufficient electricity and natural gas capacity in British Columbia is delaying housing construction, industrial expansion, and commercial development, particularly in high-growth regions such as the Okanagan. Businesses are facing longer project timelines, escalating costs, and uncertainty due to grid constraints and new energy allocation processes. A lack of timely, coordinated, and balanced energy capacity is emerging as a structural constraint on economic growth, housing supply, and business competitiveness across British Columbia.

Background

British Columbia is experiencing sustained population growth, rapid electrification of transportation and buildings, and increasing industrial demand for power. According to BC Hydro's 2023 Integrated Resource Plan, provincial electricity demand is projected to increase by approximately 15% by 2030 and up to 50% by 2040 due to electrification and economic development.¹ This demand growth is not limited to a single region, but is being experienced across urban, rural, and resource-based communities throughout the province.

At the same time, FortisBC has identified capacity pressures in parts of its natural gas distribution system, particularly during winter peak demand periods, requiring interim measures such as trucking liquefied natural gas (LNG) to maintain reliability in some Interior communities.² While necessary in the short term, these measures increase costs and highlight infrastructure limitations.

In the Okanagan, rapid residential growth, tourism-related seasonal population surges, agricultural processing, technology expansion, and increasing digital infrastructure demands are placing unprecedented strain on substations, feeders, and transmission corridors. Several Interior communities rely heavily on single transmission corridors vulnerable to wildfire disruption – a risk underscored by recent wildfire seasons.³

Delays in energy connection approvals and the introduction of competitive energy allocation or “bidding” processes for large loads have created additional uncertainty for developers. Housing projects, industrial facilities, and commercial expansions cannot proceed without confirmed energy capacity.

When energy availability becomes uncertain:

- Construction timelines extend.
- Financing costs rise.
- Investment decisions are deferred or redirected.
- Housing supply is constrained, exacerbating affordability pressures.

¹ BC Hydro 2025 Integrated Resource Plan, <https://www.bchydro.com/about/strategies-plans-regulatory/supply-operations/long-term-electricity-planning/integrated-resource-plan.html>

BC Hydro Clean Power 2040 Integrated Resource Plan, <https://www8.bchydro.com/toolbar/about/strategies-plans-regulatory/supply-operations/long-term-electricity-planning/integrated-resource-plan/integrated-resource-plan.html>

² FortisBC Long-Term Gas Resource Plan, <https://www.fortisbc.com/about-us/corporate-information/regulatory-affairs/our-gas-utility/gas-bcuc-submissions/fortisbc-energy-inc.-gas-submissions/LTGRP/2022-long-term-gas-resource-plan>

³ Okanagan Natural Gas Capacity & LNG Mitigation, <https://talkingenergy.ca/project/okanagan-capacity-mitigation>

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) estimates that British Columbia will require hundreds of thousands of additional housing units by 2030 to restore affordability.⁴ Energy infrastructure constraints directly undermine the province's ability to meet these targets. Meanwhile, Canada's climate commitments require that new supply be low-carbon and aligned with emissions reduction goals. Electrification of transportation and buildings is central to achieving net-zero targets.⁵ However, electrification without parallel investment in generation, storage, and transmission risks creating reliability challenges that weaken public and business confidence.

Economic Competitiveness and Investment Risk

Access to reliable, affordable energy is foundational to economic competitiveness. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce has repeatedly identified infrastructure capacity, including electricity transmission, as critical to enabling business growth and attracting investment.⁶ Regions unable to guarantee timely grid connections risk losing capital to jurisdictions with greater infrastructure certainty.

Energy capacity constraints also raise complex considerations around cost allocation, infrastructure timing, and competing demands between residential, commercial, and industrial users. A balanced approach is required to ensure that solutions support broad economic benefit without creating unintended consequences for ratepayers or specific sectors.

Resilience and Climate Adaptation

Wildfire-related transmission outages and climate-driven peak demand events expose structural vulnerabilities. Distributed energy systems, including microgrids, battery storage, rooftop and community solar, geo-exchange, and hydrogen-ready infrastructure, can enhance resilience while reducing emissions.

Federal programs administered through Natural Resources Canada⁷, Infrastructure Canada⁸, and the Canada Infrastructure Bank⁹ already support clean energy infrastructure. However, funding criteria do not consistently account for seasonal population surges or the urgent capacity constraints facing high-growth Interior regions.

Targeted federal-provincial coordination could:

- Eliminate electricity and natural gas capacity constraints on approved development projects.
- Accelerate new low-carbon supply additions aligned with projected demand.
- Reduce reliance on temporary fuel delivery solutions.
- Improve grid resilience in wildfire-exposed regions.

Removing energy as a bottleneck would unlock housing, enable industrial expansion, improve investor confidence, and strengthen long-term economic competitiveness across British Columbia.

⁴ Housing shortages in Canada: Updating how much housing we need by 2030, <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/housing-research/housing-shortages-canada-updating-how-much-we-need-by-2030>

⁵ Canadian 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan, <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/climate-plan/climate-plan-overview/emissions-reduction-2030.html>

⁶ Canadian Chamber of Commerce – Infrastructure & Competitiveness, <https://chamber.ca/strategiciissues/infrastructure/>

⁷ Natural Resources Canada, <https://natural-resources.canada.ca/>

⁸ Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/index-eng.html>

⁹ Canada Infrastructure Bank Clean Power, <https://cib-bic.ca/en/sectors/clean-power/>

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial and Federal Governments:

1. Work with utilities, regulators, and industry to ensure sufficient, timely, and coordinated energy capacity to support economic growth, housing development, and electrification objectives across British Columbia.
2. Prioritize long-term planning and investment in electricity generation, transmission, distribution, and complementary energy systems to address current and projected capacity constraints.
3. Ensure energy planning frameworks reflect regional differences in demand, growth patterns, and economic activity, while maintaining a consistent and equitable provincial approach.
4. Support a balanced and transparent approach to energy allocation and cost recovery that considers impacts on businesses, communities, and overall economic competitiveness.

CHARTING A SUSTAINABLE FISCAL PATH TO RESTORE STABILITY

Issue

British Columbia’s fiscal health is at a critical juncture. Budget 2026 outlook reveals a structural operating deficit, with no clear path back to a balanced budget. Rising provincial debt, persistent deficits, and increasing interest costs are placing long-term fiscal sustainability at risk. This raises concerns about business confidence, investment, and B.C.’s ability to invest in and respond to future priorities and unexpected challenges in a growing economy. Restoring fiscal discipline and principled public finance management is urgently needed to ensure a stable and competitive future.

Background

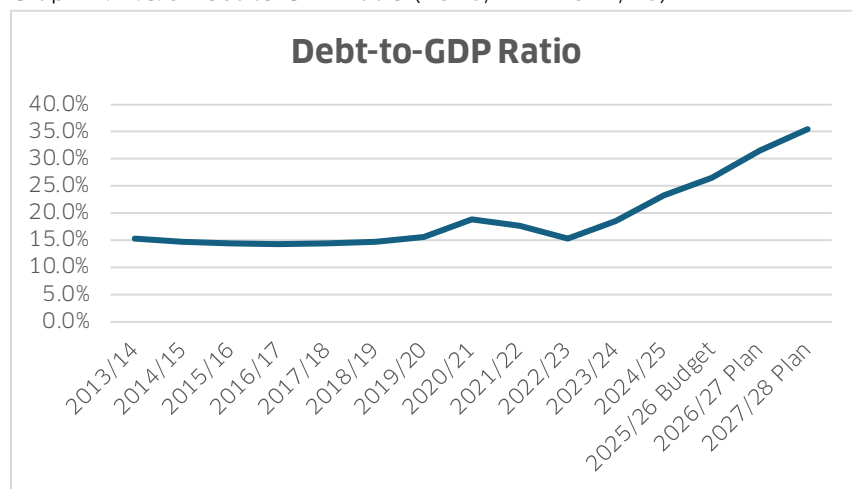
For decades, British Columbia’s fiscal strength helped attract capital and investment. However, recent provincial budget trends signal a weakening of this advantage as deficits grow and debt continues to rise, which underscores the unsustainable path the province is currently on. This shift matters as a weakening fiscal position can affect investor confidence, increase borrowing costs, and limit the province’s ability to create a stable, competitive environment for businesses to grow and invest.

Without a clear and transparent commitment to returning to balanced budgets, the province risks entrenching a high-debt, high deficit, high-interest trajectory that could undermine long-term economic competitiveness and public prosperity.

Current Fiscal Outlook

Over the past few years, B.C.’s budget deficit and debt have been on the rise. The budget deficit more than doubled, from \$5 billion in 2023/24 to an estimate of \$13.3 billion in 2026/27, according to Budget 2026. Concerningly, net debt is growing significantly faster than the underlying economy at the rate of 2.5 times. While GDP is expected to grow by 1.3% in 2026¹, the province’s net debt-to-GDP ratio has increased from 23.2% to 26.4% in just one year – well above the historic average of 15.5%.² This means debt is accumulating faster than the economy is growing, increasing the relative debt burden over time.

Graph 1: B.C.’s Debt-to-GDP Ratio (2013/14 – 2027/28)



¹ <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2026FIN0003-000158>

² https://economics.td.com/domains/economics.td.com/documents/reports/budgets/bc/BC_Budget_2025.pdf

Table 1: B.C.'s Deficit, Debt and Debt-to-GDP Ratio

Fiscal Year	Budget Deficit (\$B)	Taxpayer-Supported Debt (\$B)	Net Debt-to-GDP Ratio
2023/24 (Actual)	\$5.0	\$76.0	18.6%
2024/25 (Actual)	\$7.3	\$99.1	23.2%
2025/26 (Forecast)	\$9.6	\$116.5	26.4%
2026/27 (Plan)	\$13.3	\$142.9	30.6%
2027/28 (Plan)	\$12.1	\$166.9	34.4%

Although B.C. continues to have relatively low debt levels compared to other provinces, it is now projected to rank in the middle range in 2027 alongside Ontario and Quebec, losing the low-debt positioning that has historically attracted global capital. While comparisons with peer jurisdictions can be useful, they may not fully capture how the province’s fiscal performance has shifted relative to its own historical trajectory – an important anchor for assessing long-term fiscal sustainability.

This context matters given ongoing tariff pressures coming from Canada’s largest trading partner over the past year. Provinces such as Ontario have faced direct impacts on major industries, while B.C.’s sectoral exposure has been different. Business Data Lab’s data suggests that cities in Ontario, Alberta, Quebec and New Brunswick are among the most vulnerable to U.S. tariffs.³ Despite not experiencing the same magnitude of tariff-related disruption, the province’s fiscal outlook continues to deteriorate – indicating that the province’s fiscal challenges are structural, rather than primarily the result of external shocks.

Reflecting on the deterioration in fiscal trends, a survey by the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade found that 78%⁴ of businesses believe it is urgent for the province to return to a balanced budget.

Credit Rating

While B.C. currently maintains one of the lowest debt levels among Canadian provinces, the impact of prolonged deficits and rising debt is starting to affect how the province is perceived as a borrower. Although the province’s credit rating remains within the Grade A range, recent downgrades by major agencies signal growing concerns over debt levels and deficit projections. In April 2025, two leading global credit rating agencies downgraded B.C.’s ratings: Moody’s lowered the rating from Aa2 to Aa1⁵, and S&P Global Ratings downgraded from A-1+ to A-1⁶. S&P specifically cited “considerable” deficits and rapid debt accumulation, while warning of potential further downgrades in the next two years. Currently, four major rating agencies – Moody’s, Fitch, Morningstar DBRS, and Standard & Poor’s – have assigned B.C. a negative outlook.⁷ In March 2026, Moody’s delivered its second downgrade, citing “a marked deterioration in the province’s credit fundamentals”⁸ S&P⁹ Weaker credit ratings can increase the government’s borrowing costs and affect investor confidence, making it more expensive to finance infrastructure and public investments.

³ <https://businessdatalab.ca/publications/which-canadian-cities-are-most-exposed-to-trumps-tariffs/>

⁴ <https://www.boardoftrade.com/files/news/2024/2024-election-survey-full-results.pdf>

⁵ <https://ratings.moody.com/ratings-news/440567>

⁶ <https://www.spglobal.com/ratings/en/regulatory/article/-/view/type/HTML/id/3348513>

⁷ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/government-finances/debt-management/investor-presentation-december-2025.pdf>

⁸ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/government-finances/debt-management/moodys-ratings-march-2026.pdf>

⁹ Province of British Columbia Downgraded To 'A' Fr | S&P Global Ratings

The “Interest Bite”

The "interest bite" is a critical measure of fiscal health, indicating how much of the government’s revenue is consumed by debt servicing rather than invested in priorities such as services and infrastructure. It shows how many cents of every dollar collected in government revenue must go toward interest payments.

A rising interest burden reduces fiscal room and diverts resources away from public priorities. As more spending goes toward servicing debt, governments face difficult trade-offs, cutting services, delaying investments, or raising taxes, which can dampen growth and competitiveness. The latest provincial budget shows the interest bite rising from 5.1¢ to 8.0¢ per dollar of revenue by 2028/29, a 57% increase in just three years.

Table 2: B.C.’s Interest Costs and Interest Bite¹⁰

Fiscal Year	Interest Expense (\$B)	Interest Bite (Cents per \$1)
2025/26 (Forecast / Budget 2026)	\$5.3	5.1¢
2026/27 (Estimate / Budget 2026)	\$6.5	6.3¢
2027/28 (Plan / Budget 2026)	\$7.8	7.2¢
2028/29 (Plan / Budget 2026)	\$8.9	8.0¢

Given the province’s current fiscal situation, economic growth and productivity need to be at the centre of government decision-making to ensure spending remains prudent while maintaining service quality. The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade’s Agenda for Economic Growth campaign calls on government to focus on expanding the economy and generating the productivity gains required to sustain public services over the long term. A credible path to fiscal responsibility must also address the underlying spending and productivity challenges that determine whether government can deliver services effectively and efficiently.

Debt fueled spending and persistent deficits leave less room for investment in the services businesses and communities BC depends on. Without a credible path to reduce the deficit, the province sends negative signal to households and businesses that taxes will need to be substantially higher in the future to stabilize the government’s fiscal situation.

We need a clear and transparent plan to put provincial finances on sustainable footing, strengthen confidence, and create the conditions for private sector growth.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Establish a credible fiscal plan that demonstrates a declining debt-to-GDP ratio, sets clear deficit reduction targets, and restores taxpayer-supported debt to sustainable levels consistent with historical averages, ensuring that fiscal choices reinforce long-term productivity and economic growth. The plan should include transparent quarterly reporting.

¹⁰ Table A19. B.C. Budget and Fiscal Plan 2026. P. 174.
https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2026/pdf/2026_Budget_and_Fiscal_Plan.pdf

EMPOWERING B.C.'S CRAFT DISTILLERIES TO FUEL LOCAL PROSPERITY

Issue

British Columbia is home to approximately 85 craft distilleries. They are found in communities small and large across the province. Yet craft distilleries face structural barriers that limit their ability to grow, compete fairly, and contribute fully to local economic resilience, despite being deeply embedded in local value chains and communities.

We need to encourage local investment, innovation, and employment in BC by addressing the barriers faced by local BC craft distilleries that are in place through low production caps, high markup structures at BC Liquor (BCL) Stores, and high federal excise rates.

Background

Craft Distillers in BC

In 2013, the BC Provincial Government established two categories of distilleries in BC: “Commercial” and “Craft”. Commercial distilleries can be of any size, and they can use anything to distill, including Neutral Grain Spirit (NGS) – alcohol that is distilled by large-scale distilleries, primarily from corn, and sold to other users, while also being a finished product itself.

The “Craft” designation means a BC distillery must:

- Produce no more than 50,000 litres of spirit per year (for context, a large distillery can produce 2 to 3 times this per day),
- Use 100% BC agricultural products to produce the alcohol from fermentation, and fermentation must be completed onsite at the Distillery.
- Use no additives, preservatives or artificial flavours.

In turn, craft distilleries benefit from “community-scale” support such as being able to sell directly to consumers through on-site sales, tasting rooms, and local farmers markets. They may also sell directly to local restaurants and private retailers.

There are approximately 85 craft distilleries in operation across communities in BC.¹

Economic importance and local value chains

Craft distilleries transform low-margin B.C. grain into high margin spirits, with one tonne of grain yielding roughly 600 L of finished spirit and up to \$30,000 or more in retail product value before taxes and markups. This transformation creates local jobs in farming, trades, production, design, marketing, and hospitality, amplifying the value that stays within B.C.’s communities.

As with the Okanagan wine industry, locally produced, branded spirits can become export ready products that showcase B.C. internationally while supporting domestic supply chains and regional tourism.

Vulnerability revealed by disruptions

The 2025 BCL strike, combined with ongoing tariffs and supply chain disruptions, exposed how heavily B.C. relies on complex, external supply chains dominated by businesses with a limited local footprint. These shocks had cascading impacts on the hospitality sector and local businesses that rely on stable access to products, highlighting the need for stronger local production capacity and more resilient supply chains.

¹<https://thetyee.ca/News/2025/04/25/BC-Definition-Canadian-Liquor-Stores/>

Allowing B.C. craft distilleries to scale and diversify production would mitigate future risks by increasing local self-reliance and reducing exposure to global disruptions beyond the province’s control.

Regulatory and fiscal barriers limiting growth

The 50,000L production cap for B.C. craft distilleries artificially restricts growth, discourages capital investment, and limits economies of scale, while large spirit brands, breweries, and wineries operate with far more flexible regulatory conditions. This creates a structural disadvantage for small B.C. producers and suppresses the sector’s economic contribution and export potential.

A 142% markup applied to craft spirits sold through BCL Stores is significantly more punitive than the effective treatment of many B.C. wines and beers, especially for premium spirits, constraining market access, brand recognition, and revenue available for reinvestment.

Federal Excise Tax

Federal excise rates for spirits are disproportionately high. Craft spirit producers now pay \$14.117 per litre of bottled spirit compared to \$0.358 per litre for beer, meaning roughly 40 times- more excise per volume². This disparity undermines profitability for small distilleries, especially in a capital intensive- industry, and stands in contrast to the more favorable, tiered excise structures that have supported growth in the craft beer and wine sectors domestically and internationally.

The rates of excise duty on spirits are determined in accordance with Schedule 4 to the *Excise Act, 2001* and apply:

- per litre of spirits for spirits containing not more than 7% absolute ethyl alcohol by volume
- per litre of absolute ethyl alcohol for spirits containing more than 7% absolute ethyl alcohol by volume

Rates of excise duty on spirits

Product	Rate effective April 1, 2026	Rate effective April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026	Rate effective April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025	Rate effective April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024	Rate effective April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023
Spirits containing not more than 7% absolute ethyl alcohol by volume	\$0.358	\$0.351	\$0.344	\$0.337	\$0.330
Spirits containing more than 7% absolute ethyl alcohol by volume	\$14.117	\$13.840	\$13.569	\$13.303	\$13.042

The United States applies a federal excise tax of about \$13.50 per proof gallon (roughly \$2.80 per litre of pure alcohol) on spirits. This rate is much lower than on beer per volume, with reduced rates for small producers spur growth. The U.S. adopted reduced excise rates for craft producers (CBMA) explicitly to support small businesses and investment³.

Australia uses a volume-based system starting at around AUD \$108 per litre of pure alcohol⁴ (about CAD\$103) but offers concessional rates for low-alcohol products and supports craft distillers through rebates, fostering industry expansion. These jurisdictions demonstrate that lower, tiered excise duties encourage investment, supports small domestic producers, and drive long-term sector growth without undermining revenue.

² <https://www.ttb.gov/public-information/industry-circulars/ttb-industry-circular-2022-3>

³ <https://distilledspirits.org/taxes-federal-regulations/>

⁴ <https://www.foodanddrinkbusiness.com.au/news/first-spirits-excise-rise-for-2026>

Need for parity and policy alignment

Unlike breweries and wineries, B.C. craft distilleries have not yet received comparable excise relief or regulatory flexibility, despite operating within the same highly regulated distribution system and competing against large international brands.

Craft spirits from B.C. distillers are premium products, often priced at \$50-\$100+ per bottle due to artisanal methods, local ingredients, and small-batch production. Their high-cost targets consumers seeking quality over quantity. These premium priced products are not targeting high-volume or budget drinkers who might be targeted through harm reduction taxation policy in support of health initiatives. British Columbia is home to Craft distilleries in communities small and large across the province. We can encourage local investment, innovation, and employment in BC by supporting local BC craft distilleries with higher production caps, competitive markup structures at BC Liquor (BCL) Stores, and more equitable federal excise rates.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Increase production cap to ensure craft distillers can operate and scale profitably
 - a. Raise production caps for B.C. craft distilleries so they can scale operations without losing key benefits tied to their “craft” status.
 - b. Ensure that the structure of revised thresholds promote investment, innovation, and job creation across the sector while maintaining appropriate public health and safety oversight.
2. Support BC distillers through reduced BCL Stores markups and in-store visibility.
 - a. Reduce the BCL markup so B.C. craft spirits can be sold in BCL stores at a competitive price within each product category, and that aligns with the treatment of B.C. wine and beer.
 - b. Design markup reforms to improve visibility and competitiveness of local BC spirits on BCL shelves, supporting brand recognition, revenue growth, and reinvestment in local facilities and employment.
3. Advocate for reduced federal excise tax structure for small distilleries
 - a. Work with the Government of Canada and other provincial partners to implement a tiered or reduced federal excise tax regime for craft spirit producers, comparable to the relief already provided to small breweries and wineries.
 - b. Support reforms that align B.C. practice with other countries who have demonstrated that reduced excise encourages investment and long-term sector growth.

EXEMPTING CHARITABLE FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES FROM PST IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Issue

BC currently requires registered charities to collect and remit Provincial Sales Tax (PST) on certain fundraising activities, including auctions and sales of donated goods. This approach imposes a disproportionate administrative burden on these often small, volunteer-driven organizations, may reduce net charitable proceeds, and risk discouraging business and community donations. The province should align with other Canadian jurisdictions by exempting bona fide charitable fundraising activities from PST.

Background

The charitable sector is a significant contributor to British Columbia's economy and community wellbeing. Across Canada, the sector represents more than 8% of national GDP and employs over 2.7 million people, including approximately 360,000 workers in British Columbia.

In 2013, BC implemented rules requiring registered charities to collect PST on certain fundraising transactions, particularly charity auctions and sales of donated goods. For many years, this requirement saw limited enforcement. However, recent direction to at least one BC hospital foundation to begin collecting PST has created renewed uncertainty and concern across the charitable sector.

In BC, the PST applies depending on the relationship between the item's value and the winning bid. If the item's fair value is 80% or more of the winning bid, PST is charged on the full bid amount, whereas if the value is less than 80% of the bid, PST is charged only on the fair value, recognizing the excess as a donation. For example, if at a charity auction a bidder pays \$1,000 for a diamond ring which the charity reasonably determines to be worth \$800, the value of the ring is 80% of the successful bid. In this example, the charity is then required to collect PST on the full \$1,000 donated for the ring, totaling \$70.

Most charities operate with extremely limited administrative capacity. Approximately 90% of charities employ 10 or fewer full-time staff, 77% operate on annual revenues under \$500,000, and nearly 59% have no paid staff at all. Applying complex PST rules to fundraising activities requires charities to determine fair market value of donated items, calculate taxable versus donation portions of bids, register for and remit PST, and maintain compliance records. For volunteer-driven organizations and small foundations, these requirements divert scarce time and resources away from frontline community services.

The current policy also reduces the effectiveness of charitable fundraising. Under existing rules, PST may apply to all or part of a successful auction bid depending on the relationship between fair market value and the winning bid. This increases the effective cost to purchasers and can reduce net proceeds available for charitable purposes. In the example above, might the donor bid less generously if they know that PST will be applied to their donation? Might they include the tax in the amount they are willing to spend, providing less revenue to the charity?

Other provinces in Canada provide exemptions where fundraising supports charitable purposes. Other provinces in Canada generally provide exemptions where fundraising supports charitable purposes. For example, Ontario exempts goods sold at charitable events from the HST if the proceeds support charitable activities, Manitoba exempts fundraising activities from the retail sales tax under similar conditions, and similar provisions exist in Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan. Aligning BC's approach with these other jurisdictions would recognize the unique public-benefit charities provide, remove this lingering compliance risk, and have negligible fiscal impact given its current limited application.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Providing a clear PST exemption for bona fide charitable fundraising activities—particularly charity auctions and sale of donated goods—would reduce administrative burden, improve consistency and certainty, and protect the fundraising capacity of organizations that deliver essential health, social, and community services across the province, at a time when needs are ever-increasing while resources fail to keep pace.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Amend the Provincial Sales Tax Act and/or associated regulations to exempt bona fide charitable fundraising activities, including auctions and their sale of donated goods by registered charities, from the requirement to collect and remit PST.

HALTING THE EXPANSION OF PAY TRANSPARENCY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR SMALL AND MID-SIZED EMPLOYERS

Issue

The B.C. Pay Transparency Act is scheduled to expand mandatory public pay transparency reporting to employers with 50 or more employees beginning in November 2026. While improving pay equity is an important and widely supported objective, the value of pay transparency reporting depends on the availability of robust and reliable data. Larger employers are better positioned to generate meaningful insights, while smaller and mid-sized businesses often lack the workforce size needed to produce statistically valid comparisons. Extending the requirement to these employers will impose disproportionate administrative burdens while frequently resulting in incomplete or low-value reporting. The province should halt the rollout at the current 300-employee threshold.

Background

The Pay Transparency Act introduced measures intended to advance gender pay equity in B.C. workplaces. While the business community supports efforts that promote fairness and equal opportunity in the labour market, the requirement for all employers above a certain size to complete and publish a pay transparency report each year is an undue burden on small and mid-sized employers.

Since 2023, employers of certain sizes have been required to issue annual pay transparency reports outlining gender-based pay gaps in compensation. Initially, this only applied to the Government and its six largest Crown Corporations, but it has expanded each year to include businesses with over 1,000 employees (in 2024) and then businesses with over 300 employees (in 2025). As of November 1, 2026, all businesses with between 50 – 299 employees will be required to develop and then publish publicly a pay transparency report. Importantly, “employee” is defined as anyone working for the business in BC, including both full-time and part-time employees.

To comply, employers must annually survey employees on their gender identity, track hours worked and compensation in all forms, maintain these secure records, update payroll or HR systems, and then produce and publicly post annual reports outlining compensation by gender. For many small and mid-sized businesses, this will require new administrative processes, potential system upgrades, and additional compliance costs at a time when firms are already managing elevated input and labour expenses. These businesses often lack dedicated HR capacity and the technical systems required to efficiently collect, manage, and report the required gender and compensation data.

At the same time, the policy value of expanding reporting to this segment is limited. Many employers of this size will have too few employees in one or more gender categories to produce statistically meaningful comparisons. Because the regulation requires suppression of data where fewer than 10 employees exist in a category, reports may contain little to no actionable information despite imposing the full administrative burden on the employer. This results in compliance costs without delivering meaningful insight into potential pay inequities.

The Pay Transparency Act already provides government with authority to exempt employers by regulation. Maintaining the current threshold would preserve the policy’s focus on large employers—where data is most robust, any potential impact the greatest, and administrative capacity is strongest—while avoiding unnecessary burden on small and mid-sized businesses that form the backbone of BC’s economy.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Halt the planned expansion of mandatory Pay Transparency Act reporting to smaller employers and maintain the current reporting threshold at 300 or more employees.

NEW AND INCREASED PROVINCIAL TAXES IMPACTING BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Issue

Over the past several years, the Government of British Columbia has introduced a number of new taxes and expanded several existing taxes affecting businesses and residents across the province.

While the Chamber recognizes the importance of government revenue to support essential public services, the cumulative impact of multiple taxation measures can negatively affect business competitiveness, economic investment, and long-term economic growth.

Businesses rely on predictable fiscal policy in order to make long-term investment decisions, plan capital expenditures, and expand employment. Frequent or unanticipated tax increases create uncertainty for both employers and investors.

British Columbia's economic competitiveness is particularly important as the province competes with other Canadian jurisdictions and international markets for capital investment, skilled labour, and business development.

For this reason, transparent taxation policy and meaningful consultation with the business community are critical components of responsible fiscal planning.

Background

Since 2017, the Province of British Columbia has implemented or expanded numerous taxation measures affecting businesses, consumers, and property owners.

Examples include the introduction of the B.C. Employer Health Tax, which replaced Medical Services Plan premiums and generates approximately \$2 billion annually in provincial revenue.¹

Annual increases to the British Columbia Carbon Tax raised the carbon price from \$35 per tonne in 2018 to \$80 per tonne by 2024², generating approximately \$2.4 billion annually prior to its elimination in 2025. While the consumer carbon tax was eliminated in April of 2025, the financial impact of that was not quantified. Saying that, the carbon cost to industry continues to increase in the form of addition taxation.

The provincial government has also expanded the Provincial Sales Tax to include additional digital products and services, and most recently expanded PST to several professional services including accounting, engineering, architecture, and security services beginning in 2026.³

Housing-related taxation has also increased significantly with the implementation and expansion of the Speculation and Vacancy Tax⁴ as well as the introduction of the Residential Property Flipping Tax effective January 1, 2025.⁵

Additional property-related taxation includes increases to the Additional School Tax on residential properties valued above \$3 million.⁶

¹ Employer health tax overview - Province of British Columbia

² Past carbon tax rates - Province of British Columbia

³ Notice 2026-001: Notice to providers of professional services - Province of British

⁴ Columbia Speculation and vacancy tax - Province of British Columbia

⁵ BC home flipping tax - Province of British Columbia

⁶ Additional school tax rate - Province of British Columbia

Consumption taxes have also increased through higher Provincial Sales Tax rates applied to luxury passenger vehicles, reaching 20 percent for vehicles valued above \$150,000.⁷ This includes the purchase of a typical one ton pick up truck.

Other targeted taxation measures implemented or increased during this period include increases to tobacco taxes, cannabis taxes, regional fuel taxes, and parking sales taxes in major metropolitan areas.

Collectively, these and other taxation measures are estimated to generate approximately \$6.5 to \$7.5 billion annually in additional provincial revenue, representing between \$20 billion and \$30 billion in cumulative taxation impacts over recent fiscal years.

While these policies may be implemented to achieve specific policy objectives, the cumulative effect of multiple taxation measures can create significant financial pressure on businesses and consumers.

Without a clear and transparent taxation framework, businesses face increasing difficulty forecasting costs, planning investment decisions, and maintaining competitiveness.

Meaningful consultation with business organizations, non-profits, and industry experts can help ensure that future tax policy balances fiscal needs with economic growth.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Strike an independent commission to perform a review of the provincial taxation system in British Columbia with the aim of achieving tax reform, including review of the efficiency and effectiveness of current legislation.

⁷PST 308, PST on Vehicles

SCRAP THE 2026 PST EXPANSION ON PROFESSIONAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES

Issue

Budget 2026 proposes to expand B.C.'s Provincial Sales Tax (PST) to a wide range of professional and commercial services adding non-refundable costs that cascade through supply chains, raise prices, and erode competitiveness. The B.C. Chamber members have supported a made-in-B.C. value added tax.¹ This expansion of the PST runs counter to that policy and makes B.C. less competitive.

Background

Budget 2026 is framed by an increasingly precarious fiscal environment, with the province projecting deficits totaling nearly \$37 billion over three years and planning to add \$80 billion to the provincial debt within the same period. Revenues to government are up nearly 40% in the past 5 years alone, but spending has been growing much faster. The debt is now growing 2.5 times faster than the economy, pushing B.C.'s debt-to-GDP ratio to double by the end of the fiscal plan. Meanwhile, the annual cost of servicing the debt is set to more than double to nearly \$9 billion by 2028/29, crowding out resources needed for core public services and economic growth initiatives.²

In addition to forecasting a deficit of \$13.3 billion, Budget 2026 proposes to extend PST to services including accounting and bookkeeping; security and private investigation; rental property/strata management and non-residential real estate commissions. It also applies PST to 30% of architectural, engineering, and geoscience (AEG) fees, an effective 2.1%. The change is slated to begin October 1, 2026.

PST is administered by each province's tax authority. Unlike GST/HST, PST is not a value added tax (VAT) (it is a retail sales tax) and is not recoverable. Therefore, any PST paid on purchases by a business cannot generally be claimed as an input tax credit or refund and becomes a cost of business input.³

The introduction of PST on professional and commercial services will have significant negative effects on competitiveness, affordability, and economic prosperity, including:

- *Cascading "tax on tax"* – Unlike the federal GST/HST (which offers input tax credits), B.C.'s PST is not refundable for businesses. Taxing intermediate services embeds costs into projects at each stage, then taxes the result again. This leads to a tax on tax for many products and services.
- *Administrative burden* – Thousands of firms that never collected PST will have to register, re-price engagements, and remit under a separate regime. This expansion adds cost and compliance complexity for all businesses, but especially for SMEs, as small businesses spend more time complying with government regulations per employee.⁴ A PST expansion will add a significant administrative burden for thousands of professional services- firms and their clients. These costs are estimated at up to \$7,000 per year per employee.⁵
- *Hurts competitiveness and investment* – The expansion will raise input costs, slow capital decisions, and discourage investment. Alberta has no PST; other provinces such as Ontario and Quebec have value added sales taxes that ensure business and capital inputs are refundable. Adding PST to professional service inputs widens B.C.'s cost gap relative to peers.

¹<https://bcchamber.org/sites/default/files/content-files/Policies%20and%20Positions%20Manuals/2022-2023%20BCCC%20Policy%20and%20Positions%20Manual%20FINAL.pdf>

² <https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2026/>

³ Canada - Corporate - Other taxes

⁴ <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/research-economic-analysis/canadas-red-tape-report>

⁵ <https://www.bcbc.com/news/pst-tax-hike-threatens-competitiveness-safety-and-affordability>

Sectoral Impacts of the PST Expansion in B.C.

The sectoral impacts of the PST expansion are broad and substantial. In the development sector, for example, the PST on design/AEG inputs adds material costs to already fragile pro-forma economics; the Urban Development Institute has reported estimates such as \$275,000 to construction costs and \$20,000 in annual operating expenses for a typical 300- unit rental- building.⁶

For natural resource sectors like mining, the added costs are also significant: an estimate for a junior mining company in B.C. adds costs of about \$1.3 million to a project over the next three years, while an operational mine calculated the additional added costs on engineering and geoscience services at \$3.7 million in a year, according to the Mining Association of B.C.⁷

The impact of PST will be felt also on commercial main streets and downtowns, as this expansion impacts property/strata management and non-residential brokerage commissions, leading to increased operating costs and rents for local retailers and office tenants already contending with elevated vacancies and slower leasing.⁸ This is in addition to the PST applied to security services, raising monthly operating expenses for businesses that are already paying for guards and vandalism mitigation—working at cross purposes with small business security rebates introduced in recent years. This is charging businesses an additional 7% tax to protect their staff, property, and customers from vandalism, threats, and extortion.

Moving Towards a Made-in-B.C. Value Added Tax

The BC Chamber of Commerce has supported a made-in-B.C. VAT, as B.C. is one of only three jurisdictions in Canada that use PST and does not have a value-added sales tax in place.⁹ Transitioning from PST to a VAT in B.C. would make the province more competitive on a national and international scale, lead to the creation of more jobs, and invest in local innovation.¹⁰

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Eliminate the proposed PST expansion on professional and commercial services in Budget 2026 before the October 1, 2026, implementation date.
2. Move towards a Made-In-B.C. value added tax.

⁶<https://www.biv.com/small-business/final-straw-bc-business-leaders-call-on-province-to-scrap-pst-expansion-11921002>

⁷<https://www.biv.com/small-business/final-straw-bc-business-leaders-call-on-province-to-scrap-pst-expansion-11921002>

⁸<https://www.cushmanwakefield.com/en/canada/insights/canada-marketbeats/vancouver-marketbeats>

⁹ B.C., Manitoba, and Saskatchewan levy PST which are not VATs. Quebec's QST is the only provincial sales tax that is a value-added tax, other provinces use either the federal Goods and Services Tax (GST) alone or the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST), both of which are value-added taxes.<https://www.retailcouncil.org/resources/quick-facts/sales-tax-rates-by-province/>

¹⁰<https://bcchamber.org/sites/default/files/content-files/Policies%20and%20Positions%20Manuals/2022-2023%20BCCC%20Policy%20and%20Positions%20Manual%20FINAL.pdf>

KEEPING BC FORESTRY COMPETITIVE: IMPROVING ACCESS TO WOOD, JOBS, AND INVESTMENT

Issue

British Columbia's forest sector is a cornerstone of the provincial economy, supporting tens of thousands of family-sustaining jobs, hundreds of communities, and a diverse value chain from silviculture to advanced manufacturing. Yet the sector is facing unprecedented pressure from rising costs, regulatory complexity, and constrained access to wood, and global market volatility.

Without timely action to improve access to economic wood and strengthen competitiveness, additional mill curtailments and closures are likely—impacting rural and First Nations communities, reducing public revenues, and undermining B.C.'s capacity to supply low-carbon building materials. The province requires a coordinated strategy to ensure forestry can continue to be a solution for housing, climate resilience, reconciliation, and economic growth.

Background

Forestry remains one of British Columbia's largest export industries and a critical employer in every region of the province. In 2022, B.C.'s forest sector contributed \$17.4B to provincial GDP, supported about 100,000 jobs (direct, indirect, and induced), delivered \$9.1B in annual wages, salaries and benefits, and generated \$6.6B in government revenues¹. The forest sector also leads in Indigenous representation, with 4,800 Indigenous people directly employed in the sector². Forest products are essential to addressing Canada's housing shortage, replacing higher-carbon materials, and advancing a bioeconomy that utilizes more of every tree. They are a large share of provincial exports, representing roughly 20% of total merchandise exports by value³.

However, the operating environment has deteriorated significantly, and the sector is under sustained pressure. Softwood lumber production in the province has fallen by roughly 60% since 2016⁴, and the province has seen 21 permanent or indefinite mill closures since 2023⁵ with significant impacts on contractors, suppliers, local communities, and First Nations:

- Access to wood has become unpredictable. Lengthy and duplicative permitting processes delay harvesting approvals, leaving mills unable to plan production and workforce needs with confidence.
- Costs in B.C. exceed competing jurisdictions. Administrative burden, overlapping regulations, and escalating fees have reduced investment and eroded global competitiveness. Delivered wood costs in BC has outpaced all other North American jurisdictions with costs rising 77% since the year 2000.⁶
- BC Timber Sales is not delivering as intended. The program was designed to provide a stable, market-based log supply, yet volumes and timing have become inconsistent, affecting companies throughout the forest value chain. They have consistently underperformed over the past several

¹ <https://cofi.org/new-cofi-economic-impact-study-affirms-forest-industry-vital-to-provincial-economy/>

² <https://cofi.org/wp-content/uploads/Economic-Impact-Report-2024-Exec-Summary-April-9.pdf>

³ https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/ca3ad618-b023-4f22-b3f2-e9de1bee92d3/resource/596619b7-990f-44c1-a5cd-7753f3a3a540/download/exp_annual_bc_exports.pdf

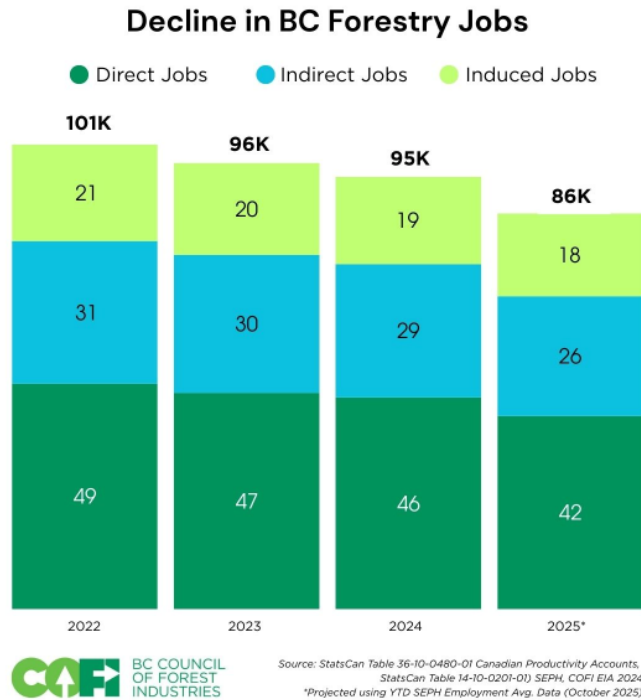
⁴ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1610001701>

⁵ <https://www.biv.com/news/resources-agriculture/bc-forest-sector-faces-another-tough-year-in-2026-11793817>

⁶ <https://cofi.org/wp-content/uploads/OKelly-Acumen-Competitiveness-Sustainability-Study-in-the-BC-Forest-Sector-Technical-Report.pdf>

years, with the 2025 fiscal year recording harvest levels 40% below their rationalized apportionment⁷.

Table 1 - Decline in Forestry Jobs



The layering of these impacts has resulted in BC forestry jobs (direct, indirect and induced) declining from 101k to 86k in the last four years, as shown in Table 1 above.⁸

At the same time, active forest management is increasingly important for wildfire risk reduction, ecosystem restoration, and climate adaptation. When logs cannot move from the forest to mills in a timely way, communities lose jobs, forests become more vulnerable to fire and decay, and opportunities for value-added manufacturing are missed.⁹

A competitive and predictable forest sector is therefore not only an economic priority—it is central to community resilience, reconciliation, and environmental stewardship.

⁷https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/forestry/bc-timber-sales/business-plan-performance-reports/fy2025_bcts_licence_issued_public_report_-_fullyear_byquarter.pdf

⁸ <https://forestnet.com/upcoming-conventions-west-and-east-will-be-dealing-with-some-very-challenging-forest-industry-issues>

⁹<https://cofi.org/cofi-statement-on-bc-budget-2026/>

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Conduct an internal audit to identify efficiencies and automation opportunities that will streamline the permit development processes, reduce administrative burden, and enhance coordination across ministries, with the goal of accelerating access to economic fibre so timber reaches mills in a timely way.
2. Conduct an internal audit with the goal of improving the cost structure by rationalizing cumulative regulatory, administrative, and fee-related pressures affecting harvesting and manufacturing, and ensuring new policies consider impacts on delivered wood costs and global competitiveness.
3. Deliver a reliable and competitive supply of logs through BC Timber Sales to support independent mills, contractors, and workers, with transparent volume targets and improved auction scheduling.
4. Provide First Nations with the capacity, tools, and revenue-sharing mechanisms needed to expedite referrals, participate in tenure and manufacturing opportunities, and advance shared economic and stewardship objectives.
5. Explicitly integrate active forest management as a tool for provincial climate adaptation and wildfire mitigation strategies. Proactive forest management tools such as fuel reduction, salvage, thinning, and prescribed burning support resilient working forests that both store carbon and reduce emissions.

EQUITABLE MEDIVAC AND HEALTH ACCESS FOR RURAL B.C.

Issue

British Columbia's rural and remote communities face systemic barriers to emergency medivac and essential health services, creating inequities that hinder business recruitment, retention, and economic growth.

Rural British Columbians lack equitable access to medivac services, return transportation post-discharge, and non-emergency care like maternity and cancer treatment, violating Canada's Health Act accessibility principles. Businesses bear indirect costs through workforce disruptions, with employees facing thousands in out-of-pocket travel expenses and prolonged absences.

Background

B.C. Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) manages air and ground ambulances but underutilizes certified private carriers, leading to delays—e.g., Fort Nelson patients endure 4-hour ground transfers despite local air options 12 minutes away. The Travel Assistance Program^{233F} (TAP) excludes meals, lodging, and emergency returns, forcing families to self-fund relocations, such as expectant mothers leaving 4-6 weeks early at \$4,000+ cost.^{254F 255F}

Between 2020^{234F 235F 236F 237F 238F} and 2026, the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services repeatedly called for targeted reforms to improve rural health care access. Across multiple Budget Reports, the Committee consistently recommended:

- Expanding medical travel supports, including improvements to the Travel Assistance Program (TAP), patient transportation, medivac and air ambulance services, and reliable return transportation.
- Establishing and funding rural health councils to ensure community-driven planning and decision-making.
- Improving coordination and access to specialist services in rural, remote, and coastal communities.
- Investing in digital health and innovative service delivery models to expand care in underserved areas.
- Strengthening recruitment and retention through incentives, expanded training seats, loan forgiveness, physician assistants, midwives, and community-operated health centres.
- Expanding patient navigator services and improving transitions between hospital, home care, long-term care, and community-based services.
- Supporting the development of community health centres and improving public, intercity, and air transportation options for rural patients.

Despite consistent recommendations over five consecutive budget cycles, these reforms remain incomplete, underscoring the need for sustained implementation and accountability in rural health care policy. BC Rural Health Network notes that rural access barriers remain in Budget 2026 and that distance, transportation, accommodation costs, and workforce fragility still delay or block care.^{239F}

Rural British Columbia's medivac and health access crisis stems from centralized inefficiencies, inadequate financial support, and overlooked local solutions, disproportionately burdening businesses and families.

Businesses in rural and remote communities depend on their ability to recruit and retain workers. When employees and their families do not have confidence in timely medivac services, coordinated return

transportation, and financial support for required medical travel, it creates hesitation to relocate, remain, or invest long term in these regions.

Rural residents frequently face extended wait times for medical transport, significant out-of-pocket expenses for travel and accommodation, and limited coordination for return transportation following treatment. The financial burden and emotional strain placed on families during already vulnerable moments undermines household stability and long-term community confidence.

For employers, this translates into increased absenteeism, workforce instability, and reduced ability to attract skilled professionals. When essential health access is uncertain, overall economic resilience weakens.

Equitable and reliable medical transportation services are not only a healthcare issue. They are foundational to sustaining stable communities and competitive rural economies. These gaps violate equitable care principles while stifling economic vitality in remote communities.

Medivac Delays and Inefficiencies: BCEHS centralization ignores local assets and strands patients despite making commitments to use approved private transportation.

Financial and Discharge Burdens: No return support leaves patients without funds, clothing, or escorts; TAP fails in emergencies.

Business Impacts: Rural businesses struggle to attract workers and industries due to health access risks, exacerbating labour shortages in forestry, mining, and tourism.

Missed Opportunities: Telehealth, navigators, and private partnerships (e.g., Alberta's STARS model) remain underfunded.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Emergency Medical Transport Reform
 - a. Mandate BCEHS Reforms and require utilization of vetted private carriers for northern/remote medivacs where capacity exists and enable regional dispatch flexibility.
 - b. Guarantee coordinated and funded return transportation for patients who have been medevac'd outside their home community for medically required services.
2. Financial & Travel Support Modernization
 - a. Enhance & modernize the Travel Assistance Program to provide reasonable coverage for transportation, accommodation, and related expenses including retroactive emergency reimbursements and integrate with electronic health records for seamless claims
 - b. Provide maternity relocation grants, expand telehealth/digital tools, and implement Budget 2026 Recommendations 29, 31, and 33 on community care and transport.
3. Rural Health System Coordination
 - a. Work with local governments, health authorities, First Nations and industry to streamline health services and adopt Select Standing Committee recommendations, including rural health councils with business input.

INVESTMENT IN SENIOR CARE– THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BC’S AGING POPULATION

Issue

Challenges associated with senior care are impacting the business community. The limited availability of appropriate senior care, challenge navigating the options, and the uncertain quality and reliability of some senior care support means that productive employees in our B.C. economy need to leave the workforce to help support and care for their aging parent.

Background

Numerous studies over the last few decades have been warning us about this growing senior’s population and its impact on the workforce, and yet here we are. In 2024, B.C.’s seniors’ population (65+) was 1,127,346 and has grown 19% over six years and 44% over ten years. Seniors represent 20% of the provincial population compared to 19% in 2019 and 17% in 2014¹. B.C.’s senior population is projected to increase 26% in the next 10 years², placing unprecedented demand on care systems, families, and the workforce. At the same time, many working-age adults are balancing careers while providing care for their aging parents.

The last several years has been proven to be the most challenging ever for seniors and their adult children in BC. It has put the lack of resources for seniors and healthcare workers in the spotlight from not only a social issue but an economic one.

Many employees are already faced with the reality of balancing their careers with significant family obligations as they need to care for children, aging parents, or both.

In 2017, the federal government changed the employment insurance (EI) to provide a family caregiver benefit of up to 15 weeks to care for an adult family member whose life is at risk and who has experienced a significant change in their baseline state of health. These were welcome changes in the law that underlined three important realities that will demand a greater role of family members in providing direct care to seniors approaching their final years: financial, demographic, and moral.

Canada will need to nearly double its long-term care by 2035 as baby boomers continue to age and B.C. will need to prepare for that increased demand for aged care services or more citizens will be forced to exit the workplace to care for aging parents. It is understandable that these adult children providing care to aging parents report considerable caregiver stress and poor perceived mental health and ultimately leave the workforce, whether it’s a leave of absence, early retirement or simply a termination to focus on the full-time care giving. Almost one-third of family caregivers are in distress; this has increased 3.4% in the last five years. On average, 82% of clients of distressed caregivers receive less than two hours of service per day.

Longevity, technology, and family shifts mean that more people are surviving into lengthy periods of disability, and care is concentrated on fewer people, many of whom must maintain employment and face significant work, health, and financial consequences in order to sustain caregiving³.

¹ <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/app/uploads/sites/4/2026/03/report-monitoring-seniors-services-2025.pdf>

² <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/current-issues/new-data-seniors-population-increase-outpacing-long-term-care/>

³ - Resource: A Study Paper in February 2010 prepared by The British Columbia Law Institute & The Canadian Centre for Elder Law called ‘Care/Work - Law Reform to Support Family Caregivers to Balance Paid Work and Unpaid Caregiving’. - <https://www.bcli.org/sites/default/files/FamilyCaregivingReport.pdf>

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

“OVER TWO-THIRDS OF ALL SENIORS’ CARE IN THE PROVINCE IS DELIVERED BY NON-GOVERNMENT PROVIDERS – WHICH INCLUDES BOTH PRIVATE AND NOT-FORPROFIT PROVIDERS. MANY NONGOVERNMENT PROVIDERS ARE FUNDED DIRECTLY BY THE REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES TO DELIVER SENIORS’ CARE SERVICES ACROSS THE PROVINCE.” – BC CARE POLICY 2021

Increase Availability of Senior Care - Development and Capacity Constraints

The last provincial review of seniors’ care was conducted in the late 1990s. From 2001 to 2016, access to publicly funded long-term care beds has declined by more than 30 per cent. At the same time, the provincial government introduced an alternative to long-term care, a new housing model called assisted living, called the Community Care and Assisted Living Act. While many seniors welcomed this more home-like model of seniors’ residential services, it is important to note that the funding level for this new assisted living model was approximately half of what it was for long-term care.

Low to moderate-income residents and their families, who can barely afford the cost of the basic service package have no better alternative. A recent study highlights significant unmet care and personal needs for these residents—not by choice, but because they can’t afford the fee structure in private-pay assisted living residences, where seniors pay more for each additional service provided.

This points to the importance of improved funding and better planning of seniors’ services to ensure that there are enough subsidized non-profit assisted living residences and long-term care facilities to meet the needs of B.C.’s aging population.

There is a shortage of the well-trained healthcare workforce capable of caring for a much larger population of older adults. There is also a critical shortage in health care workers and professionals. There are also not enough trained staff to meet the sector’s needs, either now or in the foreseeable future when Canada will have many more “older” adults.

There is a need to create more government and private sector long-term care homes in our communities across B.C. In particular, smaller communities across B.C. are impacted. Investment is required to add more senior care homes and expedite approval of construction and development to meet the current and future demand for all B.C.’s seniors.

The expansion of seniors’ care capacity is increasingly constrained by rising construction costs, labour shortages, and lengthy municipal approval processes. These barriers affect all providers; private, public, and non-profit, and limit the ability to deliver new care spaces in a timely manner.

Without targeted action to address these constraints, the gap between supply and demand will continue to widen, further exacerbating workforce pressures. Private-pay and mixed-model care play an important role in expanding overall system capacity and relieving pressure on publicly funded services. Supporting the viability and growth of all care models is essential to meeting demand.

Stay-at-Home & Long-Term Care

Lack of care options has huge ripple effects on Canada’s economic productivity, as people increasingly leave the workforce to support an aging parent. We need more care facilities for seniors who do not find “stay at home” an option that meets their health, safety, family support and financial interests.

Over the past five years, the senior population has grown 22% but the number of home support clients has only increased by 15%. The current BC ‘Better at Home’ initiative supports those who prefer or can live and be supported at home, but unfortunately, due to the lack of public beds it’s a waitlist for a vulnerable senior until a bed comes available. Sadly, when affordable long-term care is required, it is simply not available.

Stay at Home Challenges

Home health care: Home care and home support options enable seniors to get the help they need at home. Services range from publicly subsidized care, which is delivered through the person's health authority, to customized private-pay options, which can include medical care, transportation, companionship, and home making.

The "*We Must Do Better: Home Support Services for B.C. Seniors*"⁴ report in 2023 by the B.C. Seniors Advocate, finds the province's home support services need fundamental restructuring, as follows:

- Overall, 34% of family caregivers in B.C. are in distress and this rises to 57% when looking at clients who are receiving less than an hour per day of home support.
- Most provinces do not charge for home support services. B.C. does charge and is the most expensive.
- 61% of seniors moving into a long-term care facility had no home support 90 days prior to admission (similar to five years ago).

B.C.'s rate of newly admitted long-term care residents with low care needs is twice as high as Alberta and Ontario who do not charge for home support and is 34% higher than the national average.

Recruitment and retention of home support is one the greatest challenges. 75% of the health care workforce is part-time or casual. This needs to change if we are to attract the workforce needed to meet demand.

Also, public home support is unaffordable to most seniors. For example, through the regulated daily rate co-payment, a senior with an income of \$28,000 is required to pay \$8,800 a year for daily home support. British Columbia is one of the few provinces to charge a fee for home support, and among those provinces that do have a fee, B.C. has the highest rate.

Long-term Care Challenges

Long-term care homes are an option for seniors who need 24-hour professional support and care because of their physical needs, or because they have advanced Alzheimer's disease or another dementia. For many seniors, this is the best option when the person can no longer be cared for in their own home or in an assisted living home.

B.C. has a waitlist of 7,212 seniors, who are waiting an average of 290 days for a bed in a long-term care facility to open up⁵. The number of people on the waitlist for long-term care has more than tripled over the last decade.

The demand for long-term care and assisting living is a major challenge and is predicted to grow in the face of the aging demographic. There will be 44% increase of Canadian seniors in care in 2030, compared to 450,000 today, and this does not include the majority who will receive care at home. According to the B.C. Care Providers Association, it's estimated that a minimum of 5,000 to 7,000 long-term care spaces are needed by the end decade to accommodate demand in our Province. And yet, B.C. has put on hold indefinitely seven long-term care facilities in Abbotsford, Campbell River, Chilliwack, Delta, Fort St. John, Kelowna and Squamish.

⁴ <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/osa-reports/we-must-do-better-home-support-services-for-b-c-seniors/>

⁵ <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/app/uploads/sites/4/2025/07/From-Shortfall-to-Crisis-Report.pdf>

It is a sad reality that seniors face long waitlists for public care options if they cannot afford private care homes. A historical lack of in-home care support has had a ripple effect in B.C. People who could live at home are instead taking up desperately needed beds in residential facilities, where the waiting lists to get in are long.

Impact: Lack of senior living home & home-care options

Lack of senior living home & home-care options has an impact on the care givers, often people employable in the workforce, and seniors. The impact are as follows:

1. Impact on Caregiver Work and Family needs
 - a. There are over a million family caregivers in British Columbia. Approximately 70% of the one million family caregivers in B.C. are balancing the demands of caregiving with working full or part-time⁶. They are predominantly family members in their peak earning years caring for their mothers, fathers, spouses, or adult children. This intense demand on their time can result in caregivers quitting their jobs, retiring early, cutting back on hours, turning down promotions, and losing pension contributions. Employers experience higher absenteeism rates, more lateness, and lower productivity.
 - b. It compounds the gender in-equality issues within the workforce with the burden largely being carried by women. Not only are most informal care-givers female, but women are more often the primary caregiver (67% vs. 59% of men caregivers), meaning they are the sole caregiver or provide most of the care along with other unpaid.⁷
2. It has longer-term financial impacts on this group in their retirement, career advancement, and current ability to meet their own financial obligations, let alone their parents.
 - a. Impacts on Seniors
 - b. Health: isolation, mental, physical, and spiritual - their overall well-being
3. A population of seniors with capital wealth (home ownership) but in many cases not sufficient monthly income to:
 - a. eat well (leading to malnutrition).
 - b. get enough personal and medical care at home.
 - c. adapt their houses appropriately as needed to be safe leading to hospitalizations from falls.
 - d. afford transportation alternatives to get regular medical check-ups from specialists again leading to further hospitalizations and use of ambulances.
 - e. Family members having to bridge this gap in financing the required care and putting themselves and their families at financial risk.
 - f. The results of staying at home in many regions:
 - i. Seniors may be exploited - seniors who don't have sufficient income enter higher interest reverse mortgages rather than spending on their own care
 - ii. housing/property shortage for development of multi-purpose senior communities, affordable family townhomes etc. Disproportionate number of large single dwelling homes on large properties owned by seniors (often only one person).

⁶ <https://www.familycaregiversbc.ca/caregiver-learning-center/read-resources/balancing-family-caregiving-and-work-2>

⁷ <https://www.caregiver.org/resource/women-and-caregiving-facts-and-figures/>

Need for Private In-Home Care Regulation

The most common misconception about the private home care industry in British Columbia is that the industry is government regulated and licensed. There is the assumption private agencies are licensed, must abide by strict hiring policies and carry comprehensive liability insurance coverage.

In fact, the B.C. private home care industry is not government regulated. There are no licensing requirements to operate a private home care agency. Care aides are not required to be certified or criminal background checked. There are no liability insurance requirements.

Any individual, company or franchise can operate a home care agency. It is legal to hire unqualified and uncertified care aides with no criminal background checks required. Unqualified care aides are permitted into private homes to legally administer all forms of critical care. Liability insurance is discretionary. A care aide is often assumed to be an accredited professional.

A care aide is a generic term for one who assists with the care of another individual - it is not a certification. A care aide may or may not be certified.

Service Provider Funding

All service providers, including non-profit, public, and private sectors all play a role in services needs. But the funding model for the important work that non-profits contribute is inefficient and needs improvement.

Non-profits providers spend significant time seeking grants and the funding provided is very often short term. This results in non-profits provider uncertainty, staff turnover and loss of momentum. It also results in frequent and confusing program changes, and significant administrative time to write grant proposals to seek continuation of the service or program being delivered. It is a problem that is growing and so should be long-term commitments, and growth should be consistent with the growth of this population group.

Access & Navigation

Navigating the seniors' living and care continuum is challenging. B.C. Senior care options are difficult to navigate; users and seniors find it difficult to learn what care options and support is available, and at what price.

Launched in 2019 and updated in 2023, Route 65 was created by EngAge B.C., an operating arm of the B.C. Care Providers Association. Route 65 is a free, online tool that helps connect seniors and their family members with the services offered by B.C.'s leading operators of independent living, assisted living, long-term care, and home health care. But there remain many gaps.

Route 65 needs to be better advertised and embraced by the health authorities as they assist families in navigating a complicated system of private and public options. In particular, the platform needs to address the sudden nature of the need for support and service - including "*Crisis Capability*" to respond to immediate needs of seniors and their families in crisis.

Canadians are living longer, and our healthcare system is reeling under the pressure of too many seniors occupying hospital beds due to the lack of care options in their community. It means their family members and loved ones are facing agonizing choices on how to support an aging parent, companion or spouse.

If we do not prepare for the anticipated doubling and tripling of demand for aged care services, our healthcare system could buckle due to overwhelming demand. By investing in recruitment and training to strengthen the healthcare workforce, and ensuring that our infrastructure is the best available, a more positive picture emerges for British Columbia's families.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government

1. Increase availability of senior care to all who need it, where they need it.
 - a. Expedited approval of construction and development of more private and public senior care facilities across all communities in BC.
 - b. Expand options for care facilities for seniors where “stay at home” is not an option that meets their health, safety, family support and financial interests.
 - c. Extend the terms of yearly or multi-year funding/grant models to provide better planning and stability for non-profit organizations providing senior care.
2. Increase support and review progress to improve senior care labour force supply, training, and in-home care standards.
3. Improve access to and navigation of Senior Care Service options.
 - a. Study and financially support gaps in service for a clear, equitable service and care pathway for all seniors, of all needs and ability to pay.
 - b. Create an integrated, supportive platform that provides a “One Stop Shop” to navigate all public/private options for senior care and progressive support. The platform should be kept current and include Crisis Capability to respond to immediate needs of seniors in crisis.

ADDRESSING B.C.'S HOUSING CRISIS & HIGH DEVELOPMENT COSTS

Issue

B.C. faces a sustained housing affordability crisis characterized by rapidly rising housing costs, constrained supply, and elevated development fees that pose barriers for developers and potential homeowners/renters alike. Despite proactive municipal initiatives, systemic cost pressures, particularly high developer levies and carrying costs, limit housing construction and affordability.¹

Background

Housing demand is driven by population growth, immigration, and regional economic attractiveness. Market housing costs (rent and ownership) have outpaced income growth, making affordability a central issue for workers, families, and employers.²

Elevated Development & Municipal Fees

- Development Cost Charges (DCCs), Amenity Cost Charges (ACCs), and permit levies in B.C. are among the highest in Canada relative to other municipalities, increasing per-unit construction costs significantly.³ These costs are often well beyond inflation and typical construction-cost escalation. In many cases, the magnitude of the increases is significant, particularly in a province with a long history of coordinated regional and urban planning.⁴
- These fees are designed to fund infrastructure (parks, water/sewer, community facilities), but they substantially add to the upfront costs developers must bear, reducing project feasibility and discouraging new supply.

Upfront Financing Burdens

- Developers in B.C. currently must pay significant charges early in the project lifecycle, tying up capital and increasing financing costs. Even with provincial changes to payment timelines, challenges persist.
- The cost of compliance with municipal fees and time-consuming approvals also act as material barriers.

From a provincial point of view, B.C. has adjusted payment timelines for development fees to lower upfront barriers, letting developers pay a smaller portion at permit issuance and the rest over several years. The B.C. Builds program provides low-cost financing and leverages underused land to accelerate middle-income housing.⁵

From a federal perspective, Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF), offers incentives to municipalities that streamline approvals and accelerate housing supply.⁶ In addition, new federal commitments include significant low-cost loan programs (e.g., Apartment Construction Loan Program) and the Build Canada Homes agency aimed at reducing construction risk and catalyzing affordable housing.⁷ Moreover, Budget

¹ Here's what's worsening the housing crisis in Vancouver | Canadian Mortgage Professional

² <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/industry-innovation-and-leadership/industry-expertise/affordable-housing/about-affordable-housing/affordable-housing-in-canada>

³ Development Cost Charges Update and Introduction of Amenity Cost Charges 2025 - District of Squamish - Hardwired for Adventure

⁴ This viewpoint was revealed during a recent meeting between BBOT membership meeting on the subject.

⁵ Homepage | BC Builds Homes

⁶ Housing Accelerator Fund | CMHC

⁷ Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada - About Build Canada Homes

2024 proposed a Canada Housing Infrastructure Fund to support critical services needed for new housing construction.⁸

Fee Structures Still Pose Cost Pressures

- Even with timing changes, the cumulative burden of municipal and regional development fees is high and continues to add hundreds of thousands to per-unit costs.⁹

Insufficient Non-Market and Deeply Affordable Housing

- Federal and provincial support for non-market housing is significant but still falls short of meeting actual need, especially for low-income households. Furthermore, projections suggest federal programs may shrink without policy renewal.¹⁰

Zoning & Planning Barriers

- While not as sticky as in some jurisdictions, rezoning delays and municipal processes still affect timelines and costs, especially for mid-rise housing. Appeals can take months or years, adding carrying costs.¹¹

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial and Federal Governments:

1. Work with municipalities to reform development charges and fee structures tied to housing starts to incentivize new construction, and development avoiding a “one-size-fits-all” model.
2. Incentivize municipalities to introduce digital application systems, guides to standardize approvals and facilitate better coordination and scope alignment between utilities and agencies.
3. Develop Infrastructure funding beyond DCCs by investigating alternative regional infrastructure funds so that municipalities can look beyond DCCs as the primary funding source for growth-related infrastructure. It is encouraging to note that the province is starting to move in this direction through proposed legislative amendments to establish new eligible project categories that municipalities could apply to reduce DCCs.¹²

⁸ Budget 2024

⁹ <https://www.altusgroup.com/insights/housing-costs-delays-and-unintended-consequences/>

¹⁰ <https://nhc-cn1.ca/publications/post/scaling-up-the-non-market-housing-sector->

¹¹ 2023 to 2024 Fees Report - Canada.ca

¹² BC Gov News / Sim pushes BC to follow Ontario in lowering development fees - Business in Vancouver

IMPROVING WORKSAFEBC CLAIMS EFFICIENCY, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, AND SYSTEM ACCOUNTABILITY

Issue

British Columbia employers are experiencing increasing claim durations, rising assessment costs, and inconsistent application of WorkSafeBC policies. Limited stakeholder collaboration and unclear communication processes are contributing to inefficiencies that impact injured workers' recovery and employers' ability to manage return-to-work obligations effectively. The Provincial Government should establish a structured, multi-stakeholder review and improvement process to enhance transparency, accountability, cost control, and timely claim resolution within WorkSafeBC.

Background

WorkSafeBC operates as British Columbia's exclusive workplace insurance and safety regulator. The system is entirely employer-funded and is intended to provide timely compensation and safe return-to-work outcomes for injured workers, while ensuring predictable and sustainable costs for employers.

However, employers across multiple sectors are reporting growing concern regarding:

- Increasing average claim durations
- Escalating system costs
- Inconsistent application of policy and decision-making
- Limited consultation with employers during claims adjudication
- Misalignment between clinicians, employers, and WorkSafeBC decision-makers
- Reduced transparency regarding cost containment and governance structure

Average claim durations have increased significantly in recent years, contributing to higher total claim costs and prolonged workforce absences. Extended claim durations not only increase direct costs to the system, but also create workforce shortages, operational strain, and economic disruption across sectors.¹

Under the Workers Compensation Act (including amendments under Bill 41), employers have a statutory duty to accommodate, and workers have a duty to cooperate in return-to-work processes. While the intent of this legislation is supported by the business community, its prescriptive and top-down implementation has resulted in inconsistent application and confusion among stakeholders.

Many employers report that claim decisions are frequently made without meaningful employer consultation, even where return-to-work planning requires employer participation. In addition, there is limited formal collaboration between WorkSafeBC, employers, healthcare providers, and labor representatives to align expectations and reduce misunderstandings.

WorkSafeBC has recently taken steps to establish advisory panels to improve alignment with clinicians; however, employer representation in these initiatives remains limited or undefined. Given that employers fully fund the system and are responsible for workplace accommodation, exclusion from strategic advisory processes undermines system accountability and effectiveness.

There is currently no formal, government-directed, multi-stakeholder mechanism tasked with reviewing systemic inefficiencies, governance alignment, cost containment practices, and collaborative processes within WorkSafeBC.

¹Microsoft Power BI

A coordinated, structured working group will include balanced representation from:

- Employers (including Chamber of Commerce and sector representatives)
- Labour organizations
- WorkSafeBC leadership
- Healthcare professionals
- Industry safety associations
- Return-to-work and disability management experts

The working group would provide a balanced and evidence-based pathway to:

- Improve claim efficiency
- Reduce system costs
- Increase trust and transparency
- Strengthen return-to-work outcomes
- Enhance long-term sustainability of the system

And should:

- Identify causes of increasing claim durations and recommend measurable targets for reduction
- Improve employer inclusion in adjudication and return-to-work planning processes
- Enhance transparency and consistency in policy application
- Recommend improvements to clinician-employer-WorkSafeBC collaboration
- Review governance and cost-containment mechanisms to ensure long-term system sustainability

Given the economic importance of predictable and efficient workplace insurance to British Columbia's competitiveness, government leadership is required to ensure the system is operating effectively and collaboratively.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government and WorkSafe BC:

1. Establish an independent, time-limited, multi-stakeholder Working Group mandated to review and recommend improvements to WorkSafeBC's claims management processes, cost containment practices, governance alignment, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms.
2. Require the Working Group to report publicly within 12 months, including cost implications, implementation timelines, and measurable performance benchmarks.

STABILIZING PROVINCIAL ATTESTATION LETTER (PAL) ALLOCATIONS TO PROTECT REGIONAL ECONOMIES AND WORKFORCE CAPACITY IN B.C.

Issue

Provincial Attestation Letters (PALs) are required in British Columbia for an international student to study in the province and confirm that the student has been allocated a place within the annual provincial PAL distribution. Recent federal caps significantly reduced B.C.'s PAL allocation, destabilizing institutions and employers who rely on international students as contributors to the labour force and local economy. Without reforms, the current model risks undermining responsible institutional planning, weakening workforce pipelines, and destabilizing regional economies.

Background

The Government of Canada through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has reduced British Columbia's PAL allocation to 32,596 for 2026, representing a 57% decrease from 2025. While federal in origin, these reductions have immediate and material regional consequences affecting institutional budgets, employer hiring capacity, and local economic stability.

International students support labour-force participation in high-demand sectors, sustain applied and technical training programs, and contribute significantly to local consumer spending. For example, in Abbotsford and the Fraser Valley, international education is directly linked to workforce development in aviation, logistics, advanced manufacturing, agri-food, and other export-oriented industries.

Abrupt and non-strategic PAL reductions risk labour shortages, program contraction, and financial instability for institutions that have demonstrated regulatory compliance and responsible growth. It also impacts the in-demand sectors of the economy requiring specialized, and in demand skills such as aviation and manufacturing.

Additionally, today's rules lack flexibility by requiring applicants to receive a new PAL when changing schools, which draws from the overall PAL allocation.

At present, the allocation model does not sufficiently distinguish long-established, publicly accountable institutions from newer or lightly regulated entities. Institutions that exercised restraint in prior allocation requests are effectively penalized, discouraging prudent long-term planning and creating avoidable volatility.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Adopt a Workforce-Aligned, Multi-Year Allocation Model that:
 - a. Prioritizes public post-secondary and long-established private institutions with a history of compliance with provincial regulations and educational standards.
 - b. Aligns allocations to documented labour shortages and applied training demand.
2. Enables Stabilization, Reallocation, and PAL Sharing by:
 - a. Establishing a provincial reserve to stabilize PALs.
 - b. Implementing a mid-cycle reallocation process for unused PALs.
 - c. Permitting controlled PAL sharing between approved institutions, subject to provincial oversight.

STRENGTHENING ELIGIBILITY PARAMETERS FOR BC'S 27-WEEK ILLNESS OR INJURY LEAVE AND REVIEWING THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF RECENT EMPLOYMENT AND STANDARD ACT CHANGES

Issue

B.C.'s new 27-week unpaid, job-protected illness or injury leave provides important support for workers facing serious health challenges. However, the absence of a prescribed minimum employment tenure creates undue cost, burden and exposure for employers, particularly small and medium-sized businesses. As this leave is just the latest in a suite of Employment Standards Act changes impacting employers in recent years, the provincial government should constrain eligibility for this leave and conduct a review of the cumulative impact of recent labour and employment law changes.

Background

In 2025, the provincial government introduced a new unpaid, job-protected leave of up to 27 weeks for employees experiencing serious illness or injury. While the business community supports balanced workplace standards that protect workers, they must remain practical for employers to administer and mitigate negative impacts on businesses. Feedback from the business community indicates that key elements of the leave's implementation lack sufficient eligibility requirements, increasing potential costs and administrative burden, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Broad Eligibility Due to Lack of a Minimum Tenure Requirement

The legislation creating this leave foresees an eligibility requirement of a certain number of consecutive days of employment and gives government clear authority to establish a reasonable tenure threshold through regulation. However, the government has decided not to regulate a minimum tenure requirement, meaning employees may qualify almost immediately, and with very limited attachment to the employer.

This creates an undue burden for small and mid-sized employers. Without a reasonable tenure threshold, businesses may be required to manage job protection obligations for employees who have only recently started their employment. For SMEs operating with lean staffing models, these requirements can create significant scheduling, coverage, and workforce planning challenges, particularly around backfilling positions and covering for absences.

B.C.'s business community is built by small business. Of the 550,000 businesses in B.C., 98% are small businesses with fewer than 50 employees.¹ Unlike large organizations with deeper staffing pools, smaller employers often lack the flexibility to absorb extended absences without incurring overtime, temporary staffing costs, or lost productivity. Establishing a clear minimum tenure requirement of 90 days of consecutive employment would improve predictability and practicality for employers and aligning it with common provisions like paid illness or injury leave (paid sick days), paid statutory holiday eligibility, and provincial termination notice and pay requirements.

Recent Legislative Changes Increasing Employer Burden

The introduction of the 27-week illness or injury leave comes amid a series of recent employment standards and labour relations changes that have collectively increased compliance complexity and cost pressures for BC employers. These include the addition of a new statutory holiday, the implementation of five days of mandatory paid sick leave, restrictions on employer use of sick notes, among others. While each measure has been advanced with specific policy objectives, their cumulative effect has materially

¹ BC Stats, Small Business Profile. Accessed online: March 3, 2026

shifted administrative and operational pressures onto employers—particularly small and medium-sized businesses with limited Human Resources capacity. As a result, a fulsome review of the cumulative impact of these changes is warranted.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Amend regulations under the Employment Standards Act to establish a minimum employment tenure requirement of 90 days for eligibility for the 27-week serious illness or injury leave.
2. Commit to a comprehensive review, with meaningful business community involvement, of the cumulative impacts of recent Employment Standards Act changes, with the objective of protecting workers while mitigating and reducing the administrative and cost burdens placed on B.C. employers

ADDRESSING THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF REPEAT NON-VIOLENT CRIME ON BUSINESSES

Issue

Businesses across British Columbia are experiencing growing financial and operational impacts from repeat non-violent crime, including theft, shoplifting, vandalism, fraud, and property damage. While individual incidents may appear minor, repeated victimization creates significant cumulative costs through lost inventory, property damage, insurance deductibles, security investments, and staff time.

These impacts disrupt daily operations, increase safety concerns for staff and customers, and force many businesses to absorb ongoing losses to remain viable. In some cases, businesses are reducing operating hours, limiting public access, or reconsidering their long-term presence in affected areas.

While recent policy attention has focused on violent repeat offenders, there remains limited coordinated action on chronic non-violent offending that repeatedly impacts businesses and local economic stability.

Chambers of commerce and business organizations across urban, suburban, and rural communities report similar patterns of repeat non-violent offending, contributing to declining business confidence and increased operating costs.

Background

Businesses across British Columbia report frequent interactions with the same individuals committing non-violent offences such as theft, shoplifting, vandalism, and property damage. Over time, repeated incidents result in escalating costs for repairs, loss prevention, surveillance systems, and staff training.

The Province of British Columbia has acknowledged the growing impact of retail theft and related property crime on communities and the economy. When announcing the Community Safety and Targeted Enforcement (C-STEP) program, the province stated the initiative was intended to address “street crimes such as robbery, shoplifting, theft and property damage, and the associated impacts on public safety, community well-being and the growth of B.C.’s economy.”¹

Small and medium-sized businesses are particularly vulnerable to these impacts because they often lack the resources to absorb repeated losses or hire dedicated security services. Business and community organizations across the province report that escalating theft and security costs are already contributing to reduced operating hours, service limitations, and in some cases, business closures.²

Crime Prevention Costs and Fiscal Pressures

Businesses are increasingly absorbing the costs of crime prevention as incidents of theft, vandalism, and disorder persist. At the same time, recent fiscal changes may increase these pressures.

The expansion of the Provincial Sales Tax to include security and investigative services will further increase the cost of private security.³

¹ Government of British Columbia. Province strengthens response to combat downtown street disorder and property crime. News Release, May 30, 2025. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2025PSSG0017-000458>

² Save Our Streets Coalition. Retail Crime and Community Impacts. <https://saveourstreets.ca>

³ Government of British Columbia. Budget 2026, Provincial Sales Tax Changes. <https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca>

Business organizations have raised concerns that the measure increases the cost of protecting businesses from crime. The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade noted that the expansion will “raise input costs, discourage investment and weaken competitiveness.”⁴

The province has introduced financial supports intended to help businesses respond to property crime. In 2023, the Government of British Columbia launched the Securing Small Business Rebate Program to assist businesses with vandalism-related costs. The program provided rebates of up to \$2,000 for vandalism repairs and up to \$1,000 for preventative measures such as security cameras or other equipment intended to deter future incidents. While programs such as this provide valuable support, businesses have indicated that current funding levels, eligibility criteria, and application processes may not fully reflect the cumulative and ongoing costs associated with repeat non-violent crime. In many cases, available funding does not keep pace with rising costs for repairs, security measures, and inflation, limiting the effectiveness and accessibility of these programs for businesses experiencing repeated incidents.⁵

Budget 2026 introduced a Chronic Property Offending Intervention Initiative aimed at strengthening monitoring and enforcement for repeat property crimes impacting businesses.

Legal and Justice Framework

Canada’s legal framework for bail and sentencing, governed by federal legislation, emphasizes restraint, proportionality, and rehabilitation.

As a result, individuals charged with non-violent offences are often released quickly with conditions, and sentencing outcomes may include probation, fines, or short custodial terms.

Statistics Canada data indicate that many individuals released from custody reoffend within a relatively short period of time, demonstrating a cycle of re-entry into the community without sustained intervention.⁶

Evidence from Business Surveys

Province-wide surveys conducted by the Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia indicate that a significant majority of businesses report moderate to severe impacts from repeat non-violent crime, including financial losses and reduced confidence in reporting.⁷

Local surveys conducted by the Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce and the Williams Lake Downtown Business Improvement Association show similar patterns, including repeat offenders, escalating losses, and reporting fatigue among business owners.

⁴Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. Statement on BC Budget 2026. [PST tax hike threatens competitiveness, safety, and affordability - Greater Vancouver Board of Trade](#)

⁵Government of British Columbia. New funding will help businesses with vandalism costs. News Release, July 26, 2023. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2023JEDI0047-001224>

⁶Statistics Canada. Reconviictions among adults sentenced to custody or community supervision. Juristat, Catalogue no. 85-002-X, February 23, 2024. See Table B: One-, two- and three-year incidence of reconviction. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2024001/article/00002-eng.htm>

⁷Business Improvement Areas of BC. Media Release, February 2, 2026. https://bia.bc.ca/index.php?area_id=1003&page_id=1108

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Increase judicial, prosecutorial, and court system capacity to reduce delays and ensure timely case progression for repeat non-violent offences impacting businesses.
2. Expand targeted enforcement, monitoring, and intervention programs for repeat non-violent offending through coordinated multi-agency approaches, including law enforcement, courts, and health and social services, with regular public reporting on outcomes.
3. Establish a standardized, province-wide business crime reporting and feedback framework in partnership with chambers of commerce, business improvement associations, and law enforcement.
4. Provide sustained and scalable funding for community-based programs and direct business supports, including grants and rebate programs that are accessible and reflect the cumulative costs of repeat incidents, including property damage, loss, and security measures.

That the Federal Government:

1. Review bail and sentencing provisions under the Criminal Code related to repeat non-violent offending, ensuring patterns of repeat offending and cumulative harm to businesses are considered in judicial decision-making.
2. Work with provinces and territories to strengthen accountability measures for repeat non-violent offenders, while maintaining alignment with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

AUTHORIZING THE USE OF COMMUNITY SAFETY OFFICERS TO COMPLIMENT THE WORK OF POLICE AS PART OF A TIERED RESPONSE

Issue

Escalating street disorder – including loitering, public drug use, vandalism, property damage, mischief, fires, break-ins, and declining perceptions of safety – is imposing significant and growing costs on businesses across British Columbia. Understaffed police detachments and limitations in bylaw enforcement authority have left local governments with insufficient tools to address low- to moderate-risk public safety concerns efficiently. A clear, principle-based amendment to the British Columbia Police Act to enable a tiered response model – applicable across both municipal police and RCMP-policed communities – would provide a more cost-effective and responsive approach while maintaining public safety standards.

Background

Across British Columbia, businesses are absorbing increasing direct and indirect costs associated with street disorder. These costs include:

- Increased private security contracts.
- Installation and maintenance of surveillance systems.
- Repair of vandalism and graffiti.
- Replacement of stolen merchandise.
- Insurance premium increases.
- Staff time spent managing disorder-related incidents.
- Lost customer traffic due to safety perceptions.

A recent survey by the Business Improvement Association of British Columbia found that rising vandalism, theft, street disorder, and related public-safety issues are pushing many B.C. small businesses toward the brink of closure.¹ Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported increased street disorder over the past year, including drug- and mental-health-related activity, theft, broken windows, violence, and aggression – conditions that have increased fear and anxiety among staff and customers and driven up operating costs. About one in five business owners said they may not remain financially viable beyond next year if conditions do not improve, while over half reported reduced foot traffic and 61 per cent cited higher expenses due to crime and vandalism, illustrating how public-safety issues are directly undermining business confidence, profitability, and long-term sustainability.

In B.C., Bylaw Enforcement Officers (BEOs) are recognized as peace officers under Section 2 of the Criminal Code of Canada when acting within the course of their duties.² This status has been upheld in court decisions.³ However, the scope of their authority remains limited relative to the public safety challenges facing municipalities.

¹ Vandalism, theft pushing many B.C. small businesses to the brink, BIV [https://www.biv.com/small-business/vandalism-theft-pushing-many-bc-small-businesses-to-the-brink-11142160#:~:text=Nearly%20three%2Dquarters%20\(74%20per,a%20better%20health%20outcome%20system.%E2%80%9D](https://www.biv.com/small-business/vandalism-theft-pushing-many-bc-small-businesses-to-the-brink-11142160#:~:text=Nearly%20three%2Dquarters%20(74%20per,a%20better%20health%20outcome%20system.%E2%80%9D)

² Criminal Code of Canada, Section 2 – Peace Officer Definition. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-46/section-2.html>

³ R. v. Jones (1975). Yukon Territory Magistrates Court. https://www.younganderson.ca/images/seminar_blogs/Appointment_and_Powers_of_Bylaw_Enforcement_Officers-DH.pdf

As a result, local governments increasingly rely on an inconsistent mix of police, BEOs, business improvement associations, and social service outreach. Many incidents fall below the criminal threshold requiring police intervention yet exceed the current enforcement authority of BEOs. Implementation considerations will differ between municipalities served by local police forces and those policed by the RCMP; however, the need for a flexible, scalable tiered response model is consistent across both contexts.

Rising policing costs and structural strain

The cost of policing in Canada has risen significantly over the past two decades, outpacing inflation, even as overall crime rates have declined.⁴ Municipal governments face mounting pressure to expand police budgets, yet small and mid-sized communities often lack the fiscal capacity to fund significant increases in sworn officers. Without alternative response models, continued reliance on traditional policing alone will place additional financial pressure on municipalities, with downstream impacts on local businesses through taxation and operating costs.

Structurally, when police resources are diverted to low-risk regulatory or public nuisance calls, response times for serious incidents are impacted. This creates further risk for businesses already facing increased exposure to theft, vandalism, and fire-related damage.

Provincial models demonstrate economic efficiency

Alberta has implemented a Community Peace Officer model that allows trained personnel to enforce municipal bylaws and select provincial legislation without requiring full police authority.⁵ Saskatchewan's Community Safety Officer (CSO) program similarly provides targeted enforcement support, freeing police resources for high-priority criminal matters.⁶

These tiered models:

- Reduce policing overtime costs.
- Provide faster response to quality-of-life and regulatory issues.
- Improve visible enforcement presence in commercial areas.
- Lower overall public safety delivery costs.

The Licence Inspectors' and Bylaw Officers' Association of British Columbia (LIBOA) has formally recommended amendments to the *B.C. Police Act* to enable a comparable model.⁷

Economic impact of inaction

Without reform, businesses will continue absorbing:

- Escalating private security costs.
- Insurance premium increases tied to property crime.
- Reduced commercial tenancy attractiveness.
- Lower retail and hospitality revenues due to safety perceptions.
- Increased fire risk from street encampments and disorder-related incidents.

⁴ Leuprecht, C. (2014). The Blue Line or the Bottom Line of Police Services in Canada? Macdonald-Laurier Institute. https://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/files/pdf/MLI_CostofPolicing_Final.pdf

⁵ Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (2020). Community Peace Officer/Police Costing Model. <https://www.abmunis.ca/advocacy-resources/resolutions-library/community-peace-officerpolice-costing-model>

⁶ Government of Saskatchewan (2014). Community Safety Officer Program. <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2014/december/01/community-safety-officer-program>

⁷ Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (2020). Community Peace Officer/Police Costing Model. <https://www.abmunis.ca/advocacy-resources/resolutions-library/community-peace-officerpolice-costing-model>

These costs are particularly burdensome for small and medium-sized enterprises that lack the financial buffer to absorb sustained operating increases.

Public safety is not solely a social issue, it is a direct and growing threat to the ability of businesses to operate, invest, expand, and remain financially sustainable.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Amend the British Columbia Police Act to authorize a principle-based, tiered public safety model allowing local and Indigenous governments to designate Community Safety Officers (or equivalent roles) with appropriate authority such as Special Constable status to address low- to moderate-risk public safety issues, in coordination with existing police services.
2. Establish provincial standards for the training, oversight, accountability, and scope of authority for Community Safety Officers, ensuring the framework is adaptable to both municipal police and RCMP-policed communities, recognizing differences in governance and service delivery models.
3. Provide local and Indigenous governments with the autonomy to determine if Community Safety Officers with special constable status are appropriate for their communities.
4. Enable local and Indigenous governments the ability to deploy Community Safety Officers with Special Constable status in commercial districts to address street disorder, regulatory compliance, and nuisance-related incidents that negatively impact business operations.

BUILDING CONSISTENT RCMP ENGAGEMENT STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT SAFER COMMUNITIES AND STRONGER ECONOMIES

Issue

Across British Columbia, RCMP detachments engage with community stakeholders in uneven and inconsistent ways. Some detachments maintain regular advisory committees or consult with organizations such as boards of trade and chambers of commerce, while others have no structured engagement at all. This inconsistency weakens policing priorities, reduces trust with the business community, and leads to missed opportunities to address public safety, crime prevention, and economic impacts.

A standardized provincial framework for community and business engagement would ensure consistent and meaningful consultation that reflects B.C.'s diverse needs and strengthens local economies.

Background

The business community is directly impacted by public safety, crime trends, and policing visibility. Businesses, boards of trade, and chambers of commerce routinely gather real-time data and insights on property crime, security costs, consumer behavior shifts, local hotspots, and impacts to investment confidence. These insights, drawn from on-the-ground experience, are critical for police to accurately assess risks, set relevant priorities, and design effective community safety responses.

However, British Columbia does not currently require RCMP detachments to follow a standardized, province-wide process for engaging external stakeholders. Engagement practices currently vary significantly depending on detachment leadership, municipal capacity, and local needs. This variability creates several challenges:

- Inconsistent policing priorities that may not reflect actual community conditions or economic impacts.
- Limited or ad hoc communication between detachments and business representatives.
- Missed opportunities for collaborative solutions related to crime prevention, hotspot management, homelessness-related safety issues, and emerging threats such as extortion.
- Uneven transparency and accountability regarding detachment priorities, metrics, and follow-up actions.

Recent events, including extortion targeting businesses in Surrey and across the Fraser Valley, demonstrate the risks of this fragmented approach. In Surrey, extortion threats and violence targeting business owners first emerged in 2023,¹ yet it was not until February 2026 that the province announced a newly established community advisory group on extortion to formalize information sharing between police, government, and affected communities.² While this is a positive step, the delay highlights a systemic issue. If structured, province-wide engagement mechanisms existed earlier, particularly with business organizations, the flow of intelligence, risk identification, and community feedback could have been faster and more coordinated, potentially reducing escalation and harm.

¹ CBC News (2025). B.C. extortion timeline: when it started and who might be behind it. Accessed February 2026, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/extortion-bc-timeline-9.6950645>

²Government of British Columbia (2026). Setting up a new community advisory group on extortion crisis. Accessed February 2026, <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2026PSSG0013-000168>

Despite ongoing challenges, there are examples of effective engagement within the RCMP. Business Link programs in Richmond,³ Langley,⁴ and North Vancouver⁵ strengthen communication with the business community, improve awareness of safety trends, and reduce crime through collaboration. However, these initiatives depend entirely on local leadership, rather than provincial requirements, and as a result, are not consistently replicated across all detachments. In 2024, the B.C. RCMP identified its core policing priorities as:

- Enhancing public safety.
- Accountability and governance.
- Employee excellence and workplace culture.⁶

Under the accountability and governance banner, the B.C. RCMP committed to building trust with the public and stakeholders through enhanced transparency.⁷ However, these priorities have not been updated since, limiting visibility into how they have evolved in response to emerging issues or local concerns, and whether they have met their engagement goals.

While these priorities provide a high-level direction, they largely align with the national RCMP strategy, which focuses on recruitment, improving workplace culture and inclusivity, and modernizing operations.⁸ Although important, these areas are not specifically tailored to British Columbia's localized public safety challenges or the need for consistent, structured community engagement. The absence of regular updates and clear communication on evolving priorities further highlights gaps in transparency, consistency, and sharing information with stakeholders, including the business community. Because there are no province-wide engagement frameworks or strategic planning structure guiding B.C. RCMP detachments, each detachment is left to create its own. These plans aim to reflect unique local priorities, for example, Mission emphasizes community safety and community connections,⁹ while Burnaby's focuses on enhancing communication and community engagement.¹⁰ Although local tailoring is essential to accurately reflect community needs, the absence of consistent provincial expectations results in uneven information sharing, inconsistent consideration of economic impacts, and unequal access for stakeholders, including the business community, to provide input.

Compounding this challenge, detachments do not follow a standardized timeline for consultation, planning, or priority setting. As a result, strategic plans are developed and implemented on different cycles across the province. For instance, Vernon North Okanagan's plan spans 2023-2028,¹¹ while

³Richmond RCMP (2018). Business Link. Accessed February 2026, <https://rcmp.ca/en/bc/richmond/services/business-link>

⁴Langley RCMP (2025). Langley RCMP – Programs and Services. Accessed February 2026, <https://rcmp.ca/en/bc/langley/services#business>

⁵North Vancouver RCMP (2024). North Vancouver RCMP Business Link Program. Accessed February 2026, <https://rcmp.ca/en/bc/north-vancouver/community-policing/business>

⁶BC RCMP (2024). BC RCMP Policing Priorities. Accessed February 2026, <https://rcmp.ca/en/bc/corporate-information/bc-rcmp-policing-priorities>

⁷Ibid, 2024.

⁸RCMP (2024). Our next chapter: The RCMP 2024-2027 strategic plan. Accessed February 2026, <https://rcmp.ca/sites/default/files/doc/our-next-chapter-rcmp-2024-27-strategic-plan.pdf>

⁹Mission RCMP (2025). Programs and services – Mission RCMP. Accessed February 2026, <https://rcmp.ca/en/bc/mission/services-and-information>

¹⁰Burnaby RCMP (2023). Burnaby RCMP Detachment Strategic Plan 2023-2026. Accessed February 2026, <https://rcmp.ca/en/bc/burnaby/corporate-information/burnaby-rcmp-detachment-strategic-plan-2023-2026>

¹¹Vernon North Okanagan RCMP (2023). Strategic Plan 2023-2028. Accessed February 2026, https://www.vernon.ca/sites/default/files/2023-06/230614%20Vernon%20North%20Okanagan%20RCMP%202023_2028%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf#:~:text=Our%20four%20strategic%20priorities%20are%20Public%20Safety%2C%20Vulnerable%20Persons%2C%20Community%20outreach%20and%20Policing%20excellence.

Burnaby's extends from 2023-2026.¹² Without an overarching framework requiring scheduled reviews and aligned planning periods, it becomes difficult to compare data, measure progress consistently, or coordinate responses across jurisdictions.

British Columbia's Provincial Policing Standards (PPS) recognize the importance of community engagement, including seeking input from a broad range of stakeholders, such as local governments, Indigenous leaders, community organizations, and the business community.¹³ However, the standards do not prescribe how engagement should occur. There are no requirements for structured advisory groups, regular meetings, data-sharing, or reporting other than a survey of citizen satisfaction that is conducted at least once every three years.¹⁴ This lack of direction results in inconsistent practices across detachments and limits the effectiveness of stakeholder input.

While similar engagement considerations may apply to municipal police departments, this policy focuses on RCMP detachments due to the province's direct role in overseeing RCMP contract policing through the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. This creates a clear opportunity to implement standardized engagement requirements across RCMP jurisdictions, whereas municipal police departments operate under independent governance structures that require a separate policy approach.

Boards of trade and chambers of commerce, which are already deeply connected to local economic ecosystems, are uniquely positioned to support this engagement. Their inclusion would strengthen evidence-based policing, improve communication, and reduce the economic impacts of crime on businesses and communities. Formalizing a province-wide engagement framework and strategic planning framework would help RCMP detachments with consistency, accountability, and align local policing priorities with real-time needs, and support safer, more resilient business environments across the province.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Develop a province-wide RCMP Engagement and Strategic Planning Framework through the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General outlining minimum standards for priority setting, stakeholder consultation, reporting, and strategic plan development. This framework should include a standardized timeline for the development, review, and release of strategic plans to ensure consistency across all detachments, regardless of geography or community size.
2. Establish a standardized, province-wide RCMP Community Advisory Framework requiring RCMP detachments to maintain formal community advisory committees that actively inform the development of strategic plans and local policing priorities. These committees should include representation from business organizations, enabling input on public safety trends, economic impacts, and community needs.
3. Mandate consistent transparency and reporting requirements across all detachments, including regular public reporting that outlines policing priorities, demonstrates how community feedback informed those priorities, and provides progress updates on key issues such as property crime, street disorder, and extortion, or other relevant local matters.

¹² Burnaby RCMP (2023). Burnaby RCMP Detachment Strategic Plan 2023-2026. Accessed February 2026, <https://rcmp.ca/en/bc/burnaby/corporate-information/burnaby-rcmp-detachment-strategic-plan-2023-2026>

¹³ Government of British Columbia (2023). Provincial policing standards: Subject 6.1.2 - Community Engagement for Equitable Policing. Accessed February 2026, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/policing-in-bc/policing-standards/6-1/6-1-2-community-engagement>

¹⁴ Ibid, 2023.

4. Ensure consistent resourcing across detachments so that rural and smaller communities have the same ability as urban detachments to maintain advisory committees, support administrative coordination, conduct data analysis and reporting, and meaningfully collaborate with the business community and stakeholders.

WHAT PRICE SAFETY HAS ON BUSINESS? HOW CAN BUSINESSES AFFORD TO KEEP THEIR DOORS OPEN?

Issue

Crime affecting small businesses in cities and towns across B.C. has increased, resulting in financial losses, safety concerns, and reduced economic vitality in multiple commercial districts in small, medium and large centres across the province. BC Budget 2026 has exacerbated these effects.

Background

Small businesses experience disproportionate impacts from theft, vandalism, and threatening and violent incidents. Unlike larger firms, they often lack resources for private security and/or loss absorption. Repeated incidents raise insurance costs, reduce operating hours, cause staff and customer attrition, and can lead to permanent closures, undermining local economies.

Tourists and local residents react to the realities by staying away from certain commercial districts, especially at night, further damaging taxis, rideshare businesses, nightclubs, theatres and sports events.

Eighteen business groups demanded that the B.C. government halt plans, announced February 24, 2026, to expand the Provincial Sales Tax to include security services. The increase would take effect October 1, 2026. The Save our Streets Coalition calls the 7% PST on private security costs punitive and unfair.¹

While the government's 2025 C-STEP program enhances police response to crime, the \$5 million initiative is considered too narrow to benefit most of the province's business communities. As well, the relatively minor impact made by the 2024 Securing Small Business Rebate program was onerous and did not meet the business needs in the most effective way.

Local Context

- 40% of B.C.'s 55,000 businesses report annual losses exceeding \$5,000². Commercial crime incidents in B.C. in aggregate are not available.
- In Kelowna, a temporary overnight security patrol conducted by a private security firm has been launched as a response to local community feedback as well as refunds for preventative security measures, all funded through the municipality.
- Numerous B.C. businesses have 'given up' reporting crime incidents due to their frequency³.
- 57% of small businesses reported being directly impacted by crime in 2024.
- Retail-sector estimates place total annual losses due to theft and related crime in British Columbia at over \$1.4 billion
- Approximately 60% of business owners report concerns for the safety of themselves, their staff, and customers 47% of businesses have altered their operations in response to crime
- Approximately 60% of business owners report concerns for the safety of themselves, their staff, and customers 47% of businesses have altered their operations in response to crime

Policy Objectives: Improve safety and economic resilience for small businesses in support of overall commercial area health

¹ CHEK News February 24, 2026 <https://cheknews.ca/>

² BIABC, February 25, 2026, <https://www.bia.bc.ca/>

³ www.castanetkamloops.net/news/Kamloops/594661/

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Convene a taskforce to explore immediate tax relief for affected businesses.
2. Remove private security firms from the PST expansion in the February 17 BC Budget.
3. Address the issue of repeated prolific offenders and remand pressures with increase in Crown Counsel capacity.
4. Ensure accessible mid- and long-term addiction treatment facilities are accessible to better address the health needs of those who turn to crime to fund their addictions.

IMPROVING RURAL ENGAGEMENT AND REPRESENTATION IN BC TRANSIT SERVICE

Issue

Rural communities across British Columbia continue to experience persistent challenges with BC Transit services, including limited routes, infrequent schedules, and service decisions that do not adequately reflect local economic and social needs. Insufficient transit services not only limit mobility, but they also directly constrain employers' ability to recruit and retain workers who lack personal vehicles. Rural residents' inability to access jobs due to inadequate public transit reduces labour force participation and constrains rural business growth.

While transit planning processes exist, rural communities, businesses, and local governments often lack structured, ongoing mechanisms to meaningfully communicate with BC Transit or influence service design. Improving provincial consultation processes and rural representation is necessary to ensure equitable, responsive, and economically supportive transit services in rural BC.

Background

Public transit is a critical enabler of workforce mobility, access to healthcare and education, and economic participation in rural British Columbia. Evidence from the Columbia Valley Workforce Mobility Transport Study (2024)¹ shows that limited-service frequency, misaligned schedules, and weak communication between BC Transit and local communities constrain access and mobility for employers, visitors, students, seniors, and lower-income workers in rural regions. Similarly, The Northern BC Inter-Community Transportation Study (2023)², initiated by Northern Development, demonstrate how transportation service gaps impact economic development and tourism.

The Columbia Valley Workforce Mobility Transport Study identifies persistent gaps between local needs and service outcomes, despite multiple prior plans, surveys, and engagement efforts dating back to 2016. Employers report that existing routes and schedules do not align with work shifts, awareness of available services is low, and requests for modest service adjustments—such as additional loops, weekend service, or new stops—are challenging to get approved. As a result, some employers have been forced to provide private transportation or limit operating hours, while others continue to face ongoing recruitment and retention challenges.

These studies show that transport accessibility is also a factor in rural tourism demand, with the quality and convenience of transport influencing destination choice and spending, which directly ties into the viability of rural tourism businesses. Tourism is a significant employer and revenue generator in many rural BC regions, particularly in areas such as Vancouver Island, Thompson Okanagan, Kootenays, and the North, where local businesses depend on visitor spending.

These findings align with the Union of BC Municipalities' advocacy to address these issues. UBCM has repeatedly called for more flexible rural transit service models (NR76, 2023)³, recognition of the higher per-trip costs of rural routes (NR77, 2023)⁴, and revisions to service allocation and expansion criteria that prioritize ridership and urban performance metrics over essential rural mobility needs (EB61, 2023;

¹ The Columbia Valley Chamber of Commerce Workforce Mobility Transport Study. April 30, 2024

² The Northern BC Inter-Community Transportation Study. August 2023. Available at: <https://www.fsjchamber.com>

³ Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM). *Resolution NR76 – Rural and Northern Transit Service Levels*. 2023 Annual Convention. Available at: <https://www.ubcm.ca>

⁴ Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM). *Resolution NR77 – Recognizing the Higher Costs of Rural Transit Service Delivery*. 2023 Annual Convention. Available at: <https://www.ubcm.ca>

EB75, 2025)⁵ ⁶. UBCM's 2025 resolution EB75 urges the province to revise BC Transit's service expansion allocation criteria so that rural communities benefit from service expansion funding, noting that the current emphasis on ridership disadvantages low-population areas. The resolution also calls for increased frequency, coverage, and reliability of rural transit services, and for greater provincial support for rural transit expansion.

BC Chamber has supported several transit-related resolutions over the years. In 2025, they adopted the policy proposal "A Sustainable Approach for Transit and Major Road Funding in BC."⁷, which recognized the importance of public transit to workforce participation across the province and the need for approaches that reflect regional realities. While that policy focused on sustainable funding, it reinforces the importance of aligning our provincial transit system with economic and labour market needs in both urban and rural contexts.

Research consistently demonstrates that rural transit systems face distinct challenges compared to urban centres, including:

Distinct Structural Barriers

- Lower population density, resulting in dispersed travel demand that makes fixed-route transit less efficient and more costly to operate on a per-passenger basis. (Phys.org)⁸
- Demographic constraints, such as aging populations and higher proportions of low-income residents, who may be more reliant on transit but have less access to regular services. (IRPP)⁹
- Higher operational costs per trip and limited economies of scale, meaning rural transit operations often lack the ridership needed to justify frequent fixed routes under conventional planning models. (Phys.org)
- Inadequate funding and human capacity, since rural governments and community organizations typically have smaller budgets and staff, limiting their ability to design, implement, and sustain transit services. (Phys.org)

Geographic and Service Gaps

- Long travel distances between residences, employment centres, and essential services like healthcare, shopping, and education are far greater in rural areas than in urban centres, increasing the cost and complexity of service provision. (Phys.org)
- Sparse, uncoordinated routes, with stops often far from people's homes, make the "first and last kilometre" problem more acute in rural contexts than in cities. (ETSI-BC)¹⁰
- Limited alternatives to public transit, such as taxis, ride-shares, or micro transit, are less viable in rural communities due to higher costs, fewer providers, or lack of profitability. (ETSI-BC)
- For example, in a Southern Interior BC ground transportation study, stakeholders noted that rural residents often rely on personal vehicles because scheduled transit services were unavailable, limited, or poorly coordinated with community needs. This pattern differs significantly from that in urban regions, where transit options and first- and last-kilometre solutions are more plentiful. (ETSI-BC)

⁵ Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM). *Resolution EB61 – Expanding and Improving Rural Transit Service Allocation Processes*. 2023 Annual Convention. Available at: <https://www.ubcm.ca>

⁶ Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM). *Resolution EB75 – Strengthening Rural Transit Coverage and Reliability*. 2025 Annual Convention. Available at: <https://www.ubcm.ca>

⁷ BC Chamber of Commerce. *A Sustainable Approach for Transit and Major Road Funding in BC*. Approved Policy Resolution, 2025 Annual General Meeting. Available at: <https://bcchamber.org/>

⁸ Phys.org, 2023 Why Rural Canadians need public transit just as urgently as suburbanites.

⁹ IRPP, Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2024 Rural Recognition: Affordable and Safe Transportation Options for Remote Communities

¹⁰ ETSI-BC, 2023 BC Southern Interior Regional Ground Transportation Study

Gaps in Research and Policy Understanding

- Some literature emphasizes that rural mobility research is less developed than urban studies, and that rural places are often treated as a homogeneous category despite their diverse contexts. (Phys.org)
- A lack of nuanced understanding can lead to policy and planning frameworks that default to urban-centric criteria (for example, ridership thresholds and cost-efficiency measures) that do not align with the realities of rural travel demand. (SSHRC)¹¹

Health, Social, and Economic Consequences of Rural Transit Gaps

- Rural residents may face reduced access to healthcare, education, employment, and social services because distance and limited-service options make travel difficult or time-consuming. (Center for Transportation Studies)¹²
- The absence of robust transit options disproportionately affects vulnerable populations (seniors, low-income households, individuals without vehicles), which can exacerbate social isolation and health inequities compared to urban residents who typically have multiple mobility alternatives. (IRPP)

Table 1 – Key Differences Between Rural and Urban Transit Contexts

Feature	Rural Communities	Urban Centers
Population density	Low, dispersed → higher cost per ride	High, concentrated → supports frequent service
Service demand patterns	Irregular, spread out	Predictable, concentrated
Transit economics	Limited economies of scale	Economies of scale reduce the cost per trip
Alternative mobility options	Fewer (ride-share, taxis limited)	Multiple (subways, buses, ride-share)
Infrastructure support	Limited sidewalks, shelters	Extensive infrastructure network
Policy visibility	Often overlooked in planning	Core focus of transit planning

Source: Phys.org, PKP Open Journals¹³

Despite this body of evidence and policy direction, existing BC Transit engagement mechanisms do not consistently provide structured, early, two-way communication with rural stakeholders, nor do they ensure meaningful rural representation in planning and governance. Strengthening these processes is a necessary precursor to more effective, efficient, and equitable rural transit outcomes.

Inadequate engagement with rural communities has direct economic consequences. Employers face challenges attracting and retaining workers who rely on public transportation, particularly youth, seniors, and lower-income residents. Tourism-dependent communities experience barriers to visitor mobility, while residents encounter reduced access to healthcare, training, and essential services. Strengthening

¹¹SSHRC, 2022 The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Navigating Rural: Place-Based Transit Solutions for Rural Canada

¹²Center for Transportation Studies Rural Transportation and Health

¹³PKP Open Journals, 2022 Not In Service-A Typology of Barriers Facing Rural Transit Systems

consultation and representation processes would improve service alignment with local economic development priorities and community needs.

In summary, rural transit systems face systemic structural and geographic barriers that are not typically found in urban centers. Research shows that policy frameworks rooted in urban models often fail rural communities, resulting in gaps in service planning, funding, and meaningful engagement with rural stakeholders. This underscores the importance of the procedural changes proposed in our resolution.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Formalize rural engagement and representation. Establish structured, ongoing mechanisms for rural engagement with BC Transit, including formal rural representation in advisory, governance, or planning bodies, to ensure consultation and participation from rural local governments, Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade, Indigenous communities, and service users.
2. Apply context-sensitive and cost-effective rural planning criteria and public reporting. Direct BC Transit to incorporate flexible, context-appropriate planning criteria and provincial standards for rural transit services that consider economic, workforce, social, and regional development impacts in addition to ridership metrics, and to publicly report on how rural impact has informed service decisions.

PROTECTING ECONOMIC STABILITY AND EMERGENCY MOBILITY THROUGH SECONDARY TRANSPORTATION ROUTES

Issue

Communities across British Columbia that rely on a single highway corridor to connect with the next major urban centre face increasing economic and public safety risks due to recurring closures caused by wildfires, landslides, accidents, and security incidents. As climate-related events increase in frequency, ensuring both economic resiliency and environmental sustainability must be balanced in infrastructure planning. With health care, post-secondary education, supplies, and other essential services and products increasingly centralized in urban hubs, the absence of reliable and strategically prioritized secondary transportation options represents a critical infrastructure vulnerability requiring provincial action.

Background

Highway 97 serves as the sole north-south connector between Penticton and Kelowna. Over the past decade, this corridor has been repeatedly closed due to landslides¹, wildfires², collisions, and other emergency events³. During these closures, residents, businesses, emergency responders, and medical patients have been left without a safe and viable alternative route.

The lack of a maintained secondary corridor has resulted in:

1. Supply Chain Disruption: Businesses rely on predictable transportation for inventory, agricultural inputs, construction materials, and time-sensitive deliveries. Disruptions increase operating costs and reduce reliability in commercial contracts.
2. Labour Market Constraints: When employees cannot commute due to corridor closures, businesses face reduced productivity and service interruptions. This is particularly critical for health care workers, trades, tourism operators, and service-sector employees.
3. Tourism Revenue Loss: The South Okanagan's tourism sector depends heavily on seamless access from Kelowna International Airport and the Central Okanagan. Corridor closures reduce visitor confidence and redirect travel spending to other regions.
4. Investor Confidence and Risk Perception: Investors evaluate infrastructure redundancy when assessing regional expansion opportunities. Communities reliant on a single transportation corridor are perceived as higher-risk markets, particularly amid increasing climate-related events.
5. Agricultural and Perishable Goods Risk: The Okanagan's agricultural sector depends on reliable transportation for time-sensitive shipments. Even temporary closures can result in spoilage, missed export windows, and financial losses.

During closures of Highway 97, including the January 27, 2025, Bennett Bridge incident⁴, motorists attempted to use FSR 201 in unsafe conditions⁵, resulting in emergency rescue operations. Forest Service Roads are overseen by the Ministry of Forests, and maintenance responsibility lies with industrial users holding permits such as forest (logging) companies. FSR's are not built or maintained to the same standard as roads intended for public use⁶.

¹<https://globalnews.ca/video/9927533/3000-cubic-metres-of-rock-closes-highway-97-between-summerland-and-peachland>

² <https://globalnews.ca/video/11312544/out-of-control-wildfire-burning-near-peachland>

³ <https://globalnews.ca/news/10982698/kelowna-bridge-closure-talks-second-crossing-bomb-squad/>

⁴ <https://www.castanet.net/news/Kelowna/587729/Transportation-story-of-the-year-Bennett-Bridge-bomb-scare>

⁵<https://www.castanet.net/news/Kelowna/529943/Drivers-rescued-after-vehicles-became-stuck-on-201-Forest-Service-Road>

⁶https://www.oag.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/963/2024/08/OAGBC-20210119-Management-Forest-Service-Roads_RPT.pdf

This issue is not unique to the South Okanagan. In September 2025, Highway 20 connecting Bella Coola to Williams Lake was briefly closed due to the Beef Trail Creek wildfire.⁷ While the closure only lasted for a day, it had the potential to sever the community from the rest of British Columbia for an indefinite amount of time, and with it their economy which is based on eco- and adventure tourism, forestry, and commercial fishing and processing.

In June 2023, the Cameron Bluffs wildfire forced the closure of Highway 4, the only paved corridor linking Port Alberni, Tofino, and Ucluelet to the rest of Vancouver Island. The highway was closed for weeks and resulted in more than \$60 million in lost revenue for those three communities⁸, demonstrating the economic vulnerability of tourism and service-based economies when a single corridor fails.

Transportation redundancy is not a discretionary convenience, it is foundational economic infrastructure required to safeguard business continuity, protect jobs, and secure the long-term competitiveness of British Columbia's regional economies. Solutions must be scalable, cost-effective, and environmentally responsible.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Develop a targeted provincial resiliency framework that identifies and prioritizes communities most at risk due to single-corridor dependence, while integrating environmental and ecological considerations into infrastructure planning.
2. Prioritize the assessment and improvement of existing alternate routes – including select Forest Service Roads where feasible – focusing on safety, seasonal operability, and emergency readiness, rather than defaulting to new route construction.
3. Implement a phased and prioritized investment strategy that focuses first on high-risk corridors, supported by dedicated, multi-year funding tied to clear economic and safety outcomes.
4. Conduct formal cost-benefit and economic impact analyses that compare multiple solutions, including route improvements, mitigation strategies (e.g., slope stabilization, wildfire prevention), and demand management, to ensure the most effective use of public funds.
5. Collaborate with local governments, Indigenous communities, emergency services, and industry stakeholders to validate need, share data, and build broader provincial support for prioritized action.

⁷<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/evacuation-order-wildfire-cariboo-regional-district-sept-2-1.7623602>

⁸<https://globalnews.ca/news/11092776/highway-4-closure-revenue-loss/>

STRENGTHENING NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA'S TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS TO DRIVE MAJOR PROJECTS

Issue

Northern British Columbia plays a foundational role in the provincial and national economy. This region – roughly the size of France – supplies energy, forestry, mining, agriculture, and tourism activity that supports jobs and revenue across the province and throughout the country. However, much of the transportation network that connects this region to Pacific ports and southern markets relies on aging two-lane highways, vulnerable river crossings, and insufficient rail capacity.

A modern, integrated transportation strategy for British Columbia must recognize northern and rural corridors as essential trade and supply routes, not secondary highways. Investment decisions should prioritize safety, reliability, and economic impact, with coordinated planning across highways, bridges, rail, and port connections.

Without a coordinated investment in highways, bridges, and rail infrastructure, these constraints will continue to raise costs for business, reduce safety, limit economic growth, delay final investment decisions on major projects, and weaken access to global markets.

Background



As the map above shows, five of the projects referred to the Major Projects Office for further review are located in Northern British Columbia.¹ These projects are:

- the Red Chris mine expansion
- the Ksi Lisims LNG project
- Phase 2 of the LNG Canada project
- Phase 2 of the North Coast Transmission Line
- Phase 3 of the North Coast Transmission Line

¹<https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/major-projects-office/projects/map.html>

These five projects are massive, multi-year private and public-sector nation-building projects worth tens of billions of dollars.² The North Coast Transmission Line will not only connect Yukon to the Canadian energy grid, it will reduce carbon emissions by two to three million tonnes per year while powering Red Chris and other major mining projects in what is known as the Golden Triangle.³

Northern British Columbia highway and rail transportation corridors connect these projects – and many others currently in development or newly operational but not identified as major projects – to the ports of Port of Prince Rupert and Port of Vancouver, which are critical to Canada’s trade with Asia Pacific markets.⁴ However, the current infrastructure is aging and requires significant upgrades, particularly at vulnerable bottlenecks, such as:

- The Highway 97 corridor between Dawson Creek and Fort St. John remains partially two lanes, despite heavy industrial and commercial use.⁵
- The Taylor Bridge is an aging structure in poor condition that serves as a critical link across the Peace River for northern communities and industry. Its condition and capacity limitations create both safety risks and economic vulnerability.⁶
- The Highway 97 Pine Pass through the Rocky Mountains connecting northeastern BC to the rest of the province has been identified as having a significant number of high-risk areas for closure due to extreme weather events.⁷
- In the Cariboo region, the Quesnel River Bridge is another aging crossing in poor condition while serving as an essential link in north-south trade and travel.⁸

Additionally, limited rail capacity, including restrictions on heavier carloads and insufficient branch line access, forces a higher share of freight onto highways, accelerating road deterioration and increasing collision risk.⁹ Combined, these infrastructure deficiencies demonstrate the need for a coordinated approach from the provincial and federal governments.

The benefits from federal and provincial government investments in Northern B.C. transportation infrastructure include:

- Boosting investor confidence in the viability of major projects.
- Quicker, safer, more reliable access to national and global markets.
- Building supply chain resilience through upgraded highways, stronger bridges, and improved rail alternatives that reduce the risk that a single incident or weather event cuts off communities or halts trade.
- Improving public and worker safety.
- Shifting appropriate freight to rail and upgrading infrastructure to modern standards reduces long-term maintenance costs and extends the life of highway assets.

² <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/major-projects-office/projects/national.html>

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/major-projects-office/projects/national.html#6>,

https://cmscontent.nrs.gov.bc.ca/geoscience/PublicationCatalogue/InformationCircular/BCGS_IC2022-05.pdf

⁴ <https://tc.canada.ca/sites/default/files/2025-06/transportation-canada-annual-report-2024.pdf>

⁵ https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/reports-and-reference/reports-and-studies/highway-97-cariboo-north/alaska_hwy97_corridor_study.pdf

⁶ <https://www.structuremag.org/g/article/inspection-evaluation-and-rehabilitation-of-the-taylor-bridge-gusset-plates/>

⁷ <https://pievc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/PIEVC-Meta-Analysis-Case-Studies-6-BC-MOTI-Case-Study-2024.pdf>.

⁸ <https://bcchamber.org/policy-search/building-safe-transportation-corridor-central-and-northern-communities-2024>

⁹ <https://www.fsjchamber.com/sites/default/files/content-files/20220425%20Final%20Report%20-%20Draft%20V1.pdf>

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial and Federal Governments:

1. Recognize Northern British Columbia transportation corridors as nationally significant trade routes that support Canada's access to Asia Pacific markets.
2. Adopt a Northern British Columbia transportation corridor strategy that identifies and prioritizes highway, bridge, and rail investments.
3. Develop cost-shared funding for Northern British Columbia transportation infrastructure improvements.
4. Prioritize infrastructure funding for projects that reduce heavy truck volumes on highways by strengthening rail alternatives and intermodal connections.

ACCESS TO SAFE DRINKING WATER TO PROTECT BUSINESS STABILITY AND ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Issue

Reliable access to safe drinking water is foundational economic infrastructure. Business operations, investment attraction, workforce retention, and regional competitiveness all depend on stable and predictable water systems. In many parts of British Columbia, particularly in small, rural, and remote communities, water infrastructure instability is creating direct economic risk. Businesses face rising operating costs, service disruptions, and reduced consumer spending, while communities struggle to attract and retain investment.

Background

Water infrastructure across British Columbia is facing increasing strain due to aging systems, deferred maintenance, regulatory requirements, population growth, and climate-related pressures. While water system delivery is often locally administered, provincial regulations, standards, and funding frameworks significantly influence the cost and sustainability of these systems, with the economic consequences of infrastructure failure extending far beyond local governments. In many cases, limited local tax bases and governance structures make it difficult to finance major upgrades without significant external support, raising important questions about the appropriate role of the provincial governments.

These challenges are most acute in small, rural, and regionally governed systems, where limited tax bases and dispersed populations make it difficult to absorb capital costs while maintaining economic competitiveness.

In the South Okanagan, residents connected to the Sage Mesa Water System near Penticton are facing a potential \$33 million replacement cost without government assistance, equating to an approximately \$136,000 levy per property owner¹. Public reporting indicates infrastructure concerns were identified years ago, yet residents are now being asked to authorize borrowing that could result in significant monthly financial burdens². Some homeowners have described the potential outcome as “economic eviction.”³

Such financial shocks have broader economic consequences:

- Reduced household disposable income directly impacts local retail, hospitality, and service sectors.
- Elevated utility costs increase operating expenses for small businesses.
- Property value instability discourages commercial investment.
- Housing affordability challenges impair workforce attraction and retention.

Water insecurity and operational risk

The Town of Osoyoos provides a second example of systemic vulnerability. The community relies on six groundwater wells feeding municipal reservoirs. During peak summer demand, even with all six wells operating at full capacity, reservoir levels have fallen to approximately 40 percent, leaving no contingency capacity in the event of mechanical failure. Municipal officials have warned that if reservoir

¹ Castanet, Water woes at Penticton community were highlighted years ago,

<https://www.castanet.net/news/Penticton/596478/Water-woes-at-Penticton-community-were-highlighted-years-ago>

² CBC News, Residents face referendum over \$33M water system costs near Penticton,

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/penticton-water-b-c-residents-referendum-9.7067600>

³ Castanet, “Economic eviction” concerns raised over \$33 million water system upgrade,

<https://www.castanet.net/news/Penticton/566760/-Economic-eviction-Residents-concern-grows-with-33-million-cost-for-water-system-upgrade-near-Penticton>

levels fall below 35 percent, sediment disturbance could trigger a community-wide boil water advisory lasting weeks.⁴

In the City of Prince Rupert, aging water infrastructure, including century-old pipes, has resulted in repeated boil water advisories⁵, emergency conditions, and a multi-year infrastructure program exceeding \$100 million⁶. As a critical trade gateway supporting billions in economic activity, these challenges highlight the broader provincial and national economic risks associated with water system instability.

Prolonged boil water advisories significantly disrupt:

- Restaurants, wineries, and food processors.
- Hotels and tourism operators, particularly during peak season.
- Health care facilities and long-term care operations.
- Construction activity requiring potable water access.

In addition, inadequate water capacity and low- or no-flow hydrants present serious risks for fire suppression, particularly during wildfire season. This creates heightened exposure for businesses through property damage, insurance costs, and potential interruption of operations.

Provincial regulatory requirements, including water quality and infrastructure standards, are essential for public safety but can create significant financial pressures for smaller systems when not paired with predictable, long-term funding.

Provincial economic implications

These examples reflect broader provincial challenges. According to the B.C. Water & Waste Association, approximately \$7.7 billion in water and wastewater infrastructure across British Columbia is currently in very poor condition and requires immediate attention.⁷ When infrastructure reaches crisis level, capital costs are frequently downloaded onto small ratepayer bases ill-equipped to absorb them.

Unstable water systems create measurable economic impacts:

- Suppressed consumer spending.
- Increased cost of doing business.
- Delayed housing and commercial development.
- Reduced investor confidence.
- Heightened reputational risk for tourism-dependent regions.

Current funding programs are competitive and episodic, rather than predictable and system based. Businesses require certainty in infrastructure planning to make long-term investment decisions, a principle recognized by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)⁸, which identifies reliable and well-governed infrastructure as fundamental to maintaining investor confidence

⁴ Penticton Herald, Osoyoos warns of potential boil water orders amid critically low reservoir levels, https://www.pentictonherald.ca/news/article_222debc0-2841-423f-af4f-bdd2f410079b.html

⁵ <https://waterportal.ca/water-news/prince-rupert-boil-water-notice-2025/>

⁶ <https://www.canada.ca/en/housing-infrastructure-communities/news/2024/03/prince-rupert-receives-funding-to-help-upgrade-water-system-and-improve-sewer-line.html>

⁷ BC Water & Waste Association, Infrastructure Report Card and Financial Sustainability Overview, <https://bcwwa.org/site/resources/infrastructurereport>

⁸ Recommendation of the Council on the Governance of Infrastructure, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0460/>

and economic competitiveness. Without reform, water infrastructure instability will increasingly act as a structural barrier to regional economic growth.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Establish a permanent, dedicated clean water infrastructure fund, coordinated with federal programs, prioritizing small, rural, regional, and private systems where capital replacement would otherwise create economic instability.
2. Develop a provincially led, economic-impact-based cost-sharing framework that clearly defines the roles of provincial, federal, regional, and local governments, while accounting for tax base capacity, median income levels, and impacts on business competitiveness.
3. Implement provincially coordinated early-warning monitoring and oversight mechanisms for vulnerable water systems to prevent crisis-driven capital downloads and ensure timely intervention.
4. Create an emergency stabilization mechanism to prevent sudden infrastructure costs from undermining local housing affordability, business stability, and local economies.
5. Develop and implement clear provincial standards and guidance for water system resilience, including minimum requirements for emergency capacity, fire flow, and long-term asset management planning.

BOOSTING BC'S MARINE POTENTIAL THROUGH SAFETY AND ACCESS

Issue

The economies of many BC communities depend on their ocean, lake and river waterfronts. Water access in these communities provides them with economic value from any combination of recreation, commercial, industrial and other community uses.

To facilitate these many uses in areas where these waterfront uses are in proximity or overlap, there is a need for improved safety standards, better enforcement, and infrastructure investment.

A unified provincial strategy for safety protocols and waterfront access is essential to sustain BC's marine economy long-term. It will provide greater certainty for businesses operating on or near the waterfront and win greater community support.

Background

BC Waterfront Economy is significant

British Columbia is Canada's Pacific gateway – a maritime province where ocean, lake and riverside waterfronts drive trade, tourism, and community vitality. From major ports and shipyards providing high value industrial employment, to coastal tourism, fisheries, and recreation, the marine economy contributes billions annually to BC's GDP and sustains thousands of small businesses.

B.C.'s coastal maritime sector is the largest in Canada, generating approximately \$4.0 billion in total output, and sustaining jobs for 34,250 people. The sector plays a critical role in the provincial economy by connecting coastal communities and hosting essential infrastructure, including shipyards, ports and other maritime facilities¹.

The recreation water economy in British Columbia is a substantial component of the broader outdoor recreation sector, which directly contributed \$4.8 billion to the province's GDP in 2023. BC's freshwater economy is a major economic driver, with the freshwater recreational fishing sector alone generating approximately \$526 million in annual expenditures (2000-2022) and contributing over \$211 million to provincial GDP. This sector supports nearly 3,000 jobs annually².

Waterfront access supports community well being

In 2023, 79% of British Columbians participated in summer outdoor recreation, with water-side activities being a primary draw.³

Local boat launches, fishing areas, and Indigenous community hatcheries strengthen social cohesion and cultural connection to the water. Yet many communities face aging docks, unsafe congestion zones, or limited access to launch facilities, particularly for small craft and non motorized users.

Challenges of shared waterways - Safety provides Opportunity

In June 2025, a tragic collision near Cates Park (Whey ah Wichen) in North Vancouver, between a speedboat and a recreational tow tube, resulted in the death of a child and serious injury to another⁴.

¹ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/economic-development/support-business-community/sector/maritime>

² <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/economic-development/support-business-community/sector/maritime>

³ <https://www.orcbc.ca/blog/the-big-business-of-outdoor-recreation>

⁴ <https://rcmp.ca/en/bc/north-vancouver/news/2025/06/north-vancouver-rcmp-investigate-fatal-boating-incident>

In November 2025, the container vessel Ever Sigma and a pleasure craft collided in English Bay near Vancouver⁵. Although the pleasure craft began to take on water, both vessels were operational, and fortunately no injuries were reported.

These incidents typify the challenges of shared waterways: commercial traffic, tidal currents, and heavy small craft recreation all converging in narrow inshore zones. Similar challenges are faced around lakeside communities across the province where marine operators and recreation users converge.

Beyond the immediate human tragedy, these events pose wider risks to the community. They can lead to serious economic impacts for both large and small marine operators, major insurance liabilities, and reputational damage to British Columbia's tourism industry. It is critical that where waterways are shared that safety is prioritized, so that both community and economic activities can remain vibrant.

Marine safety and access in BC are shaped by shared jurisdiction

The Federal Government, through Transport Canada and Port Authorities, regulates marine navigation, vessel operation, and commercial shipping lanes. However, the Province of British Columbia holds primary responsibility for community-level infrastructure, including public docks, ramps, and access points, as well as for coordinating emergency management and supporting recreation and tourism sectors. These overlapping responsibilities create gaps in enforcement, infrastructure funding, and consistent safety standards across waterways where industrial and recreational activity intersect.

A strong provincial leadership role is therefore critical. The Provincial Government can coordinate municipal, Indigenous, and federal partners to develop shared standards and direct capital investment. The Federal Government, in turn, can focus on enforcement consistency and regulatory alignment to reduce risk in heavily trafficked or mixed-use areas.

Transport Canada regulates navigation safety, but consistent slow zone enforcement, effective hazard signage, and shoreline safety planning vary widely across jurisdictions. A coordinated provincial framework, working with federal and local partners, can close these gaps and help prevent further tragedies.

Waterfront Access provides Opportunity

Operational reviews and academic studies on BC waterways (e.g., Okanagan Lake, Fraser River, and BC Hydro managed reservoirs) have identified boat launches operating at or near capacity during peak periods, with limited parking, staging space, and amenities constraining safe access for users.

- Okanagan (Kelowna, Okanagan Lake)⁶: A City of Kelowna operational review of municipal boating facilities describes high demand, queueing, and limited parking at key launches (e.g., Water Street and Cook Road), noting that queue spillover and parking constraints affect safety and access. The report documents peak hour launch counts in the 20+ boats per hour range at some sites, with limited space for staging and queueing, which effectively makes these launches operate at or near capacity in busy periods.
- Fraser River (Lower Mainland)⁷: A UBC study on recreational boat launching on the Fraser River found that many surveyed sites have only a single lane, minimal amenities, and very limited formal trailer parking, with parking availability identified as one of the main constraints on

⁵<https://www.marinetraffic.com/zh/maritime-news/14/accidents/2025/12488/container-vessel-collides-with-recreational-vessel-in-english>

⁶ <https://kelownapublishing.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=43430>

⁷<https://open.library.ubc.ca/media/stream/pdf/52966/1.0075682/1>

launch capacity. The study notes that at busy locations, demand can exceed practical capacity at peak times (e.g., during large salmon runs), and that users reported a desire for more access points in mid river reaches where launch options are sparse.

- Reservoirs and interior lakes (BC Hydro boat ramp studies)⁸: BC Hydro monitoring of public boat ramp use at reservoirs such as Kinbasket (Columbia/Southern Interior) shows that user satisfaction increased significantly after improvements to ramps and parking, implying that previous conditions (before upgrades) were inadequate for demand. These studies also highlight that water level fluctuations can render some ramps unusable for part of the season, effectively reducing available capacity and access.

Equitable access to safe marine infrastructure ensures all British Columbians regardless of income, location, or ability, can benefit from the province's coastal and inland waterways. Strategic investment in community boat launches, docks, and storage facilities will enable more small businesses, tourism operators, and local programs to participate in marine-based economic activity. It will also strengthen the operational safety and security for larger commercial and industrial operators working nearby these other areas of waterfront activity.

Investing in safety and access together will secure the long-term full potential of BC's waterfront economy, reinforce community resilience and expand local opportunity across the province.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial and Federal Governments:

1. Establish a BC Marine Safety and Access Strategy to coordinate interjurisdictional action on multi use waterway safety, infrastructure planning, and regulatory clarity.
2. Create a dedicated provincial capital funding stream for community waterfront projects that support well separated and safe access for the potential business and community waterfront uses. This would include public ramps, docks, and storage with priority for high traffic or underserved regions.
3. Work with Transport Canada other federal marine authorities to ensure consistent slow zone enforcement, improved hazard signage, and clear safety protocols in mixed use and high-risk areas.
4. Review provincial support programs for small craft and recreation users to promote inclusive, safe, and sustainable marine access across BC.

⁸https://www.bchydro.com/content/dam/BCHydro/customer-portal/documents/corporate/environment-sustainability/water-use-planning/southern-interior/CLBMON-14_Yr8_2019-7-22.pdf

REDUCE COSTS AND DELAYS IN B.C.'s ENVIRONMENTAL WATER QUALITY REGULATORY SYSTEM

Issue

British Columbia's industries face fragmented governance related to environmental water quality. These inefficiencies delay projects, raise costs, and weaken competitiveness. Businesses must wrestle with overlapping jurisdictional oversight that results in complex permitting, unclear accountability, and inefficiencies across multiple authorities and rights holders.

Recent environmental water quality regulatory changes have expanded permitting requirements and made amendments more cumbersome. Cost-feasibility in setting water quality objectives is often overlooked, imposing heavy compliance burdens without proportionate environmental benefit.

Also, Canadian innovation exists that can support water quality regulatory and environmental objectives. A systemic process is needed to seek and support local Canadian companies with solutions that would benefit from domestic country demonstration projects.

With better alignment of permitting and regulatory processes within and across jurisdictions, clarity of accountability, and a return to a risk-based regulatory model, we can move investment projects forward faster, reduce project costs, and strengthen business competitiveness and innovation. All this can be done while maintaining environmental protection.

Background

Jurisdictional & Regulatory Uncertainty - harmonizing policies

The maritime sector is essential to B.C.'s economy, supporting national trade corridors through major coastal and interior ports. Yet, when new investment projects are put forward, project proponents regularly encounter jurisdictional challenges that result in duplicated efforts and conflicting requirements that result in project delays that hinder coastal infrastructure development and economic growth.

British Columbia's environmental water-quality governance is overseen by a mix of federal, provincial, and local/sector-specific rules rather than one single regulator. At the provincial level, B.C. sets water-quality guidelines, objectives, monitoring programs, and discharge authorizations through the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy and related legislation.¹

B.C.'s core provincial tools are approved water quality guidelines, working water quality guidelines, and water quality objectives, which are used to protect aquatic life, wildlife, agriculture, drinking water sources, and recreation. B.C. also uses discharge permitting and related authorizations, including waste discharge authorizations, for activities that may affect water quality. For drinking water, B.C.'s Drinking Water Protection Act and Drinking Water Protection Regulation set treatment, construction, operating, monitoring, and reporting requirements.²

¹<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/water-quality/water-quality-guidelines/approved-water-quality-guidelines>

²https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/air-land-water/water/waterquality/water-quality-guidelines/bc_working_water_quality_guidelines.pdf

Federal rules matter where industries affect fisheries, shipping, navigation, marine pollution, or federally regulated works. In B.C., the main federal framework includes the Fisheries Act, the Canada Shipping Act, and the Canada Marine Act, all of which can apply to marine and coastal projects.³

In practice, this creates overlapping review pathways for industrial projects that may need, provincial authorizations, federal approvals and municipal permits at the same time. This maze of overlapping authorities is both expensive and time consuming for businesses to navigate.

To address this, B.C. has an opportunity to better harmonize policies controlled directly by B.C. (e.g., water quality objectives, discharge permitting, amendments under provincial environmental statutes), while working collaboratively with federal and other government partners to coordinate national and local requirements.

Permitting, Innovation & Environmental Technologies

Marine permit applicants (ie: for discharge permits, stormwater management, shoreline restoration) face excessive administrative complexity across disconnected agencies, each with unique forms, timelines, and evidence requirements. For example, minor marine infrastructure changes can take 9–12 months for review across multiple jurisdictions. This ambiguity delays approvals, creates inconsistent enforcement, and weakens coastal restoration efforts.

A Single standardized, digital “one-window” portal could create greater certainty, encourage investment, and support innovation. For example, this program could be led by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy and begin by setting published service timelines and coordinating engagement across all levels of government. It could be phased and piloted on coastal permit integration to assess feasibility before wider rollout.

Canadian environmental technology innovation can be leveraged to support this regulatory framework, while supporting economic development. For example, creating a transparent, coordinated pathway to validate and integrate Canadian-developed environmental protection technologies into the regulatory framework. Technologies, in areas such as spill response systems or green infrastructure material could be supported through demonstration projects. These projects could in turn be proving grounds for international clients who often first seek strong domestic references.

Establishing an intergovernmental process to review and recognize such innovations would promote cleaner operations and faster adoption of proven environmental technologies across Canadian ports and waterways.

Risk-Based Model Re-Adoption

Since moving away from a risk-based regulatory approach, low and medium-risk activities have been overburdened by intensive reviews intended for higher-risk operations. The absence of streamlined processes for predictable, low-impact activities results in resource misallocation, processing backlogs, and diminished regulatory focus on actual high-risk threats.

Re-establishing a proportional, risk-based system—supported by regulations and Codes of Practice for low and medium risk activities and streamlined approvals/permits for high-risk activities would allocate expertise where it matters most, improving overall environmental oversight efficiency.

³<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/environmental-workplace-health/water-quality/drinking-water/canadian-drinking-water-guidelines.html>

Simplified Permit Amendments

Currently, even minor permit amendments require full re-review processes, imposing significant time and costs on proponents. Introducing a tiered amendment system—expediting or allowing notifications for low-risk design changes while reserving full review for high-risk alterations would improve project agility, encourage adaptive management, and maintain rigorous environmental protection standards.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Clarify lines of environmental water quality regulatory accountability
 - a. Explicitly state and describe which agency or level of government leads in Permitting, Compliance Monitoring, and Environmental Restoration oversight
2. Re-adopt a “risk-based” environmental regulatory model
 - a. For low and medium-risk activities/industries: use a streamlined Codes of Practice and/or regulations
 - b. For higher-risk activities/industries: maintain robust oversight through environmental permits
 - c. Adopt a proportional permit amendment system - allow efficient approval of low-risk changes through notification or simplified reviews.
3. Better align permitting and environmental regulatory processes
 - a. Ensure cost/benefit feasibility analysis is conducted prior to finalising environmental guidelines and objectives, to ensure they are achievable.
 - b. Share best practices on environmental protection and enhancement
 - c. Evaluate and promote adoption of Canadian-developed environmental technologies
4. Develop a unified digital “one-window” environmental permitting portal to standardize application requirements

SECTION II: POSITIONS ON SELECT FEDERAL POLICIES

ESTABLISHING MINIMUM AGE STANDARDS TO IMPROVE DIGITAL PLATFORM ACCOUNTABILITY

Issue

Social media platforms and publicly accessible generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools are widely accessible to minors in Canada with limited age verification, insufficient safety guardrails, and inconsistent reporting requirements for dangerous or harmful behaviors.

The absence of enforceable minimum age standards, effective safeguards, and clear accountability frameworks creates risks to youth safety, public safety, and community well-being. These risks increasingly result in downstream impacts that are experienced by employers, small businesses, and local economies.

Canadian businesses and communities are often left managing the social and economic consequences of harms associated with digital platforms operated by large, multinational companies. Clear, consistent regulatory standards are needed to ensure appropriate safeguards, accountability, and reporting mechanisms.

Background

The rapid expansion of social media has brought undeniable benefits in communication and innovation. However, a substantial and growing body of research demonstrates that these platforms have contributed to measurable harm to young people in Canada and around the world¹. Most social media platforms currently set minimum age requirements at 13 years². Despite this, a 2021 study found that 38% of children aged 8 to 12 were actively consuming social media content³. Current age-verification mechanisms rely largely on self-attestation and are inconsistently enforced.

Along with growing public concern (reflected in a 2026 national poll)⁴, emerging research indicates that early and unrestricted access by young people to social media platforms may be associated with a range of risks, including:

- Increased risk of youth mental health challenges⁵
- Higher incidence of cyberbullying and online harassment⁶
- Greater exposure to violent or harmful content⁷
- Increased vulnerability to grooming and exploitation⁸
- Higher exposure to radicalization or facilitation of harmful conduct⁹

These risks are not only social in nature but are increasingly being experienced by employers and communities across British Columbia, particularly as they relate to workforce development and long-term economic stability.

¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11562429/>

² <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/center-of-excellence-on-social-media-and-youth-mental-health/qa-portal/qa-portal-library/qa-portal-library-questions/age-to-introduce-social-media/>

³ https://www.common-sense-media.org/sites/default/files/research/report/8-18-census-integrated-report-final-web_0.pdf

⁴ <https://angusrei.d.org/social-media-ban-canada-kids/>

⁵ <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf> <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/child-and-youth-safety-online>

⁶ <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/child-and-youth-safety-online>

⁷ <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/09/protecting-teens-on-social-media>

⁸ <https://childsafety.losangelescriminallawyer.pro/children-and-grooming-online-predators.html>

⁹ [https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1359178926000169#:~:text="](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1359178926000169#:~:text=)

The 2021 Facebook leak of internal documents showed the company's own research found harms caused to teenage users of Instagram¹⁰. Wall Street Journal reporter Jeff Horwitz's 2023 book *Broken Code: Inside Facebook and the Fight to Expose Its Harmful Secrets* further detailed how the company chose to look away at how its own products were enabling human traffickers and drug cartels¹¹. A 2023 study by the Stanford Internet Observatory found multiple social media platforms, including Instagram, were not only "openly advertising self-generated child sexual abuse material for sale" but that "children (often teenagers) are sharing these images amongst each other"¹².

If the above is a list of serious, unintended or intended consequences of social media, it is also important to recognize that addiction was not incidental, but an intended outcome, embedded in social media's platform design from the beginning¹³. Sean Parker, the founding president of Facebook, said in a 2017 interview that the objective when developing Facebook was to create "a social validation feedback loop" that exploits "a vulnerability in human psychology"¹⁴. Tristan Harris, a former Google employee and the co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology said "our choices are not as free as we think they are" in a 2017 interview¹⁵. Harris and other former tech employees speak at length about the harms of social media, especially on kids, in the 2020 Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma*¹⁶. Dr. Anne Lembke further explains how social media use triggers the dopamine chemical response in human brains in her book *Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence*¹⁷.

Taken together, this body of evidence demonstrates that the risks associated with unrestricted access to social media—especially for children and youth—are significant, well-documented, and ongoing. These harms are not isolated incidents but systemic outcomes of design, governance gaps, and insufficient regulatory oversight, with increasing implications for communities, workplaces, and local economies.

When credible threats or dangerous behaviors occur online, platforms may suspend or remove users but are not consistently required to report these incidents to Canadian law enforcement authorities¹⁸. This creates a gap in public safety and places additional pressure on communities, employers, and emergency response systems.

International jurisdictions have begun implementing stronger youth protection measures. Notably, Australia has introduced enforceable age-based access standards and increased regulatory oversight of platforms¹⁹. These developments demonstrate that comparable jurisdictions are taking action to address similar risks²⁰.

In British Columbia, communities have already experienced the very real consequences of harmful online activity. Incidents involving online exploitation, cyberbullying, and the rapid spread of harmful content have contributed to tragic outcomes, particularly among youth. In smaller and rural communities, these events are felt across entire populations, placing immediate strain on local systems, including schools,

¹⁰ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/14/facebook-documents-show-how-toxic-instagram-is-for-teens-wsj.html>

¹² <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/712678/broken-code-by-jeff-horwitz/>
¹³ <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:jd797tp7663/20230606-sio-sg-csam-report.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://esmed.org/MRA/mra/article/view/2677>

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/nov/09/facebook-sean-parker-vulnerability-brain->

¹⁶ [https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/05/smartphone-addiction-silicon-valley-](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/05/smartphone-addiction-silicon-valley-dystopia)

¹⁷ <https://www.annalembke.com/>, <https://www.netflix.com/ca/title/81254224>

¹⁸ <https://www.annalembke.com/dopamine-nation>

¹⁹ <https://www.mccarthy.ca/en/insights/publications/bill-c-63-government-canada-intends-establish-new-responsibility-regime-social-media-operators-and-direct-content-distributors>

²⁰ <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-technology-communications/internet/online-safety/current-legislation>

²⁰ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2025/05/how-s-life-for-children-in-the-digital-age_c4a22655.html

health services, emergency response, and local businesses. During such incidents, businesses are often required to continue operating while simultaneously supporting employees and community members experiencing grief, trauma, and disruption. These situations are not isolated and have occurred in multiple BC communities, reinforcing the need for a more coordinated and preventative approach.

The business community has a direct and growing interest in safe, stable, and productive communities as these conditions are essential to workforce stability, economic growth, and long-term business sustainability. These impacts are increasingly being felt by employers across sectors, particularly in relation to workforce readiness, productivity, and workplace dynamics. The Chamber network is well-positioned to hold social media companies accountable for the effects of their products, particularly where those effects are being experienced by employers and local economies.

Employers across sectors are increasingly managing the downstream impacts of unregulated digital environments, including:

- Reduced productivity and attention capacity²¹
- Decreased capability to manage workplace feedback and professional conflict²²
- Hampered ability to have complex, in-person, workplace conversations²³ Unreasonable expectations regarding career progression and wage increases²⁴

These outcomes suggest an increasing number of young workers entering the labor market plagued by anxiety and depression. Therefore, it is in the best interest of businesses to promote a mentally sound and resilient generation of employees, ensuring a capable workforce that can contribute effectively to economic and community stability. Furthermore, these changes would level the playing field for Canadian businesses and Chamber members, allowing them to connect with their audience in a manner that is both ethical and transparent, rather than competing in an attention-driven market that prioritizes engagement over wellbeing. Pinterest's CEO has already supported this perspective, urging for a global response²⁵.

Balanced regulation does not inhibit innovation; rather, it supports long-term sustainability, consumer confidence, and trust in digital systems while providing businesses with clear and consistent operating environments. Such standards allow businesses to operate within predictable frameworks while ensuring appropriate protections for users. This distinction supports continued innovation while recognizing that different categories of technology require different levels of oversight and risk management.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Support digital literacy and safe-use education initiatives for youth, parents, educators, and employers, with a focus on responsible technology use and risk awareness.
2. Invest in youth mental health and addiction supports related to harmful or excessive digital platform use, recognizing impacts on families, workplaces, and communities.

²¹ <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.0903620106>, <https://ics.uci.edu/~gmark/chi08-mark.pdf>

²² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9778816/>

²³ <https://raybwilliams.medium.com/the-digital-disconnect-how-screen-time-threatens-childrens-emotional-intelligence-efcf78e1ddb9>, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40894-024-00245-z>

²⁴ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/job.70011>

²⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2026/mar/20/pinterest-ceo-ban-youth-social-media>

3. Collaborate with federal and industry partners to ensure that education and workforce development systems reflect safe, balanced, and productive use of digital technologies.

That the Federal Government:

1. Establish a clear duty-to-report framework requiring platforms to notify appropriate Canadian law enforcement authorities when credible threats of violence, exploitation, or criminal activity are identified.
2. Implement proportionate and enforceable compliance measures, including financial penalties or operational restrictions, for companies that fail to meet safety, and reporting requirements.
3. Develop a national framework for digital platform accountability aligned with standards applied in other sectors affecting public safety, consumer protection, and workforce well-being.

ENHANCING CRA CONTACT CENTRE ACCURACY, TRAINING, AND PROFESSIONAL ACCESS

Issue

The 2025 Auditor General's report exposes CRA contact centre deficiencies, with accuracy rates at 54% for business inquiries and 17% for individuals, plus 31-minute average waits. Accountants report educating reps on tax laws, incurring extra fees for businesses, and note the absence of efficient dedicated lines for professionals. Federal action is essential to implement accreditation, enhanced training, and dedicated services to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and support business competitiveness across Canada.

Background

The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) contact centres are vital for businesses seeking reliable tax guidance, yet the 2025 Auditor General's report reveals critical failures impacting operations nationwide.

Accuracy for general inquiries stands at 54% for business tax/benefits and 17% for individual taxes, while account-specific business queries reach 71%.¹ These low rates lead to misinformed decisions, potential penalties, and accountability risks for businesses following inaccurate advice. Timeliness issues exacerbate problems: Only 18% of calls met the 15-minute target in 2024–25 (vs. 65% goal), with 31-minute averages, 12% over 60 minutes, and 7.6 million abandoned calls amid a 30% volume surge to 32 million and 22% agent drop to 4,547.² Complaints rose 145% since 2021–22.

Businesses, especially SMEs in diverse regions like British Columbia's resources and Ontario's manufacturing, face amplified costs. Accountants report lengthy calls educating reps on tax laws, billing clients for this time, and delays from lacking efficient dedicated lines for professionals.³ While the Dedicated Telephone Service (DTS) exists for tax providers, it offers delayed email guidance without immediate or account access, insufficient for urgent needs.⁴

These deficiencies hinder competitiveness: Errors trigger audits/penalties (thousands in costs), delays divert resources, and uncertainty deters investment/growth. Root causes include outdated systems (\$190M telephony contract, projected \$214M by 2027) and limited coaching (2,200 hours from 130,000 evaluations).¹ CRA's 100-day plan includes AI and standardized training (2-13 weeks initial, plus on-job), but lacks formal accreditation like accountants' annual PD.^{5 6 7} CRA disputes accuracy figures (claiming 87-90% internally) but commits to improvements.

¹ Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2025). 2025 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada—Canada Revenue Agency Contact Centres. https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_202510_01_e_44717.html

² Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2025). 2025 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada—Canada Revenue Agency Contact Centres. https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_202510_01_e_44717.html

³ Member correspondence, Kamloops Chamber of Commerce (2026).

⁴ Canada Revenue Agency. (2023). Dedicated telephone service for income tax service providers. <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/tax-professionals/dedicated-telephone-service.html>

⁵ Canada Revenue Agency. (2025). Contact centre accuracy and service representatives training. <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/news/2025/11/contact-centre-accuracy-and-service-representatives-training.html>

⁶ National Post. (2025). CRA call centres gave wrong information 83 per cent of the time: AG. <https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/cra-call-centres-still-plagued-by-problems-years-after-audit> (based on government commitment post-report).

⁷ CBC News. (2025). CRA looking at AI, training to help call centre staff provide accurate answers. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/cra-ai-call-centre-issues-9.6957631>

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Federal Government:

1. Implement the Auditor General's recommendations, including quality evaluations prioritizing accuracy/completeness, staffing alignment to meet the 65% call answer within 15-minute recommendation.
2. Reintroduce a dedicated telephone services for tax professionals to provide immediate support.
3. Introduce and implement an accreditation program with mandatory annual development programs similar to the CPA (Chartered Professional Account) designation for all CRA phone support personnel.
4. Establish accountability measures, such as annual public reporting on performance metrics and protections for taxpayers/businesses acting on CRA advice, to enhance trust and reduce compliance costs.

