



Connect with your MLA Toolkit

REQUESTING A MEETING

You can find the contact information for your local MLA at <https://www.leg.bc.ca/members>

As a constituent, you can send a simple request for a meeting as an individual to speak with them about issues you are concerned about in your community related to mental health supports.

WHAT SHOULD I TALK ABOUT?

There are a large number of new MLAs in B.C. since the October 2024 election. As it takes time for them to learn about the issues facing their community, you can provide a valuable service by providing them with information that they may not gain from anyone else. Some of the key messages for you to consider when speaking with an elected official are outlined below.

Key messages

Introduce BCSS:

The British Columbia Schizophrenia Society is a community-based organization founded in 1982. BCSS provides vital frontline support and education for families within BC impacted by schizophrenia and other severe and persistent mental illnesses. BCSS offers direct services to family members, including children and youth, and serves rural, northern, and Indigenous communities throughout BC.

Why is BCSS important?

Chronic and persistent mental illnesses significantly impact individuals, families, and communities. Based on new evidence, BCSS has adopted a figure that schizophrenia affects 1.8% and psychotic disorders (more broadly) affect 3% of BC's population.

Both can severely disadvantage people living with these illnesses and their families. Effective treatments enable people to lead productive lives; however, when effective treatment and care are not available, negative outcomes include unrelieved suffering, substance use, longer stays in hospital, homelessness, family breakdowns and premature death. In extreme cases, untreated mental illness can result in violence, which only increases the associated stigma.

The best way to reduce stigma and help ensure that people living with serious mental illnesses along with their families can thrive is to ensure effective treatment and support are available. There continues to be a great need for information, resources, and support among families living with severe mental illnesses in our province. BCSS is committed to mobilizing support for these families and developing a diverse funding base, but the stigma associated with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses discourages many private and corporate donors from giving to this important cause.

What does BCSS do in communities: BCSS has a long-standing partnership with the provincial government. BCSS has received funding from the province that has allowed BCSS to continue providing critical programs, services, and resources to families, youth, and Indigenous communities throughout BC. These programs and services are making a meaningful impact on BC families. This includes:

- Serving 9,408 families throughout the province with one-on-one support, Family Support Groups, and Strengthening Families Together programs. BCSS served close to 1,200 new families in 2023-2024.
- Redeveloping and piloting a culturally centred and inclusive *Strengthening Families Together – Indigenous* program in partnership with the First Nations Health Authority and Indigenous communities.
- Piloting a Tweens in Control program and facilitating Kids, Tweens & Teens in Control programs across the province.
- Launching new websites for BCSS and BCSS Youth
- Increasing mental health literacy through 264 Education Presentations, and the successful *Look Again: Mental Illness Re-Examined* podcast

TIPS FOR MEETING WITH AN MLA

Take a family member or friend if you are nervous.

Introduce yourself and note you appreciate meeting with them as a constituent.

Introduce yourself to any staff and ask their names. They are important connections to MLAs and in your community.

Try to keep any introductory words to under 10 minutes to ensure there is a lot of time to respond and have a conversation with your MLA.

Make some notes on questions or requests.

Take BCSS information (ie: BCSS digital brochure, Basic Fact Sheet about Mental Illnesses, Schizophrenia Prevalence Position) with you so you can leave it behind and/or use the material as a reference to highlight your key points during the meeting.

Focus on the benefit of the work within your community.

Provide any anecdotal stories of how BCSS has helped people you know or in your community that bring a personal touch.

Thank them for their time and ask if you can follow-up with any additional information.