

# Adult Opportunities Action Plan

## September 2007

### Strategic Context

The Government of British Columbia is committed to making this province the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. This goal encompasses the continuum of cradle-to-grave public education, and will require government's leadership and concerted effort.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for literacy coordination under the ReadNow Provincial Literacy Action Plan, and for ensuring British Columbia meets the goal of becoming the best educated, most literate place in North America.

The Ministry of Advanced Education has the lead on adult literacy and adult lifelong learning in British Columbia, working with other government ministries. The Ministry of Advanced Education has developed an adult literacy strategy – the Adult Opportunities Action Plan – that aligns with several broader initiatives including the ReadNow Provincial Literacy Action Plan, the Ministry of Attorney General's Welcome BC initiatives that support new immigrants, the Ministry of Economic Development's WorkBC Action Plan, and the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation's Transformative Change Accord.

Government's efforts and goals are supported and realized through service providers, including post-secondary institutions, school district continuing education centres and community organizations. Advocacy and coordinating bodies like Literacy BC and Literacy Now are also key to success.

**Vision: British Columbia's adults will attain and maintain the literacy skills necessary to participate fully in the modern society and global economy.**

#### **Goal 1: Reduced barriers and increased participation**

Objectives:

- Stigma is reduced.
- Accessible information on program availability is provided.
- Accessible services are offered.
- Learners are given the supports they need to succeed.

#### **Goal 2: Improved literacy rates for key populations**

Objectives:

- Aboriginal learners have access to culturally appropriate programs.
- Immigrants improve their English language literacy through targeted learning, including enhanced workplace language programs.
- The workforce has the essential skills for success.
- Services are provided for other select populations.

### **Goal 3: Coordinated, quality programs that produce results**

Objectives:

- The approach to adult literacy and lifelong learning is coordinated.
- Articulated adult literacy programs across all delivery systems support learner success and provide clear pathways to higher education and jobs.
- High-quality programs support learners' goals.
- Progress is monitored and provides valuable decision-making information.

### **Success Indicators:**

- Short-term indicators include the number of learners taking literacy programs and courses, the number of courses and programs available and taken, and the number of instructional and tutorial hours taken. As data become more available and reliable, more indicators will be monitored, such as completion rates.
- Literacy rates for key populations – immigrants and Aboriginal people in particular – will improve.
- Overall literacy rates for the province will be enhanced, recognizing that improvements may take many years.
- The average literacy score will improve. Most important is upward movement within Level 1 of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey.
- A long-term indicator is an increase in the number of people moving from Level 1 to Level 2.

### **Background:**

Literacy benefits individuals, the economy and society as a whole. Research shows that higher levels of literacy lead to higher educational attainment, which in turn correlates with better health and life outcomes.

Investing in improving literacy skills provides economic returns. A recent study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and Statistics Canada found that a one percent increase in Canadians' literacy skills would increase the country's gross domestic product by 1.5 percent per year, or \$18.4 billion.

This Adult Opportunities Action Plan defines literacy as Level 3 in the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, which generally equates to high school graduation. This is considered the "desired level" to cope with the increasing demands of the knowledge and information economy, although it is a higher level of competency than people generally associate with literacy. Anything below Level 3 is considered a low level of literacy.

### **Demographic trends/research:**

- A million British Columbians between 16 and 65 have low levels of literacy, about 100,000 more than in 1994. This is roughly 35 percent of British Columbians in that age range. About 44 percent of people in this age group have low numeracy levels that prevent them from getting and keeping good jobs.
- Immigrant populations are key sources of labour force growth, but generally newcomers' English language proficiency levels are low. An estimated 436,000 of the one million people with low English language skills in British Columbia are immigrants. That equates to 59 percent of British Columbia's

immigrant population, compared with 32 percent of Canadian-born British Columbians with low literacy levels.

- Across Canada, 59 percent of Aboriginal adults between 16 and 65 have low levels of literacy, compared with 41 percent of non-Aboriginals.<sup>1</sup>
- An unemployed person is about three times as likely to be at the lowest levels of literacy as someone who is employed, and those on social assistance have much lower literacy scores. Adults with the lowest level of literacy are about six times more likely to live in a household below the low-income cutoff than those with the highest level (47 percent compared with eight percent).

## **Strategies and Actions**

### **GOAL 1: REDUCED BARRIERS AND INCREASED PARTICIPATION**

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#### **OBJECTIVE 1: STIGMA IS REDUCED**

People with the lowest levels of literacy are the least likely to seek help. According to the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, only 20 percent of people with the lowest literacy level had taken adult education or training over the previous year, compared with more than 60 percent of those whose literacy levels are high enough for the knowledge-based economy. The stigma attached to people with low levels of literacy must be reduced, which will encourage them to take part in literacy programs.

#### **Strategies and Actions:**

- Action will be taken to help lessen the stigma, raise awareness of literacy issues and programs, and promote enrolment in adult learning opportunities.
- Focus will include key populations such as immigrants and Aboriginals.

#### **OBJECTIVE 2: ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION ON PROGRAM AVAILABILITY IS PROVIDED.**

A wide variety of relevant programs must be available to improve adult literacy rates in British Columbia. Learners and potential learners need to know about their options.

#### **Strategies and Actions:**

- Ministries will work together to provide literacy learners with accessible, easy-to-use information to help them find the best possible program.
- A ‘one-stop’ information and access portal for adults who are interested in enrolling in literacy and adult education programs will be supported.

#### **OBJECTIVE 3: ACCESSIBLE SERVICES ARE OFFERED.**

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<sup>1</sup>No reliable data is available for British Columbia’s Aboriginal population due to small sample size.

Services need to be available and accessible in a way that works for learners. The delivery of services must be expanded throughout the province, using a range of service providers and different models of program delivery.

**Strategies and Actions:**

- The wide variety of programs offered by colleges, the K-12 system, community agencies and non-profit organizations will continue to be supported and expanded to meet demand.
- Increased weekend, evening and online learning will be explored.
- Regional collaboration between colleges and school districts will be increased to support better coordinated program delivery and shared services for adult learners.

**OBJECTIVE 4: LEARNERS ARE GIVEN THE SUPPORTS THEY NEED TO SUCCEED.**

Financial and other barriers prevent British Columbians from taking part and succeeding in adult learning.

**Strategies and Actions:**

- Improved access to adult basic education and English as a second language programs will be explored for adults at colleges, school districts and non-government organizations.
- Opportunities to improve access for income assistance recipients will be explored.

## **GOAL 2: IMPROVED LITERACY RATES FOR KEY POPULATIONS**

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### **OBJECTIVE 1: ABORIGINAL LEARNERS HAVE ACCESS TO CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE PROGRAMS.**

A large gap in literacy rates separates Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. Preventive strategies are needed to address low literacy rates among urban Aboriginal people. To reach Aboriginal people, curriculum and delivery of literacy programs must reflect Aboriginal culture and teaching methods.

#### **Strategies and Actions:**

- Expansion of community adult literacy programs offered by Aboriginal agencies will be pursued.
- Culturally appropriate Aboriginal literacy curricula will be developed.
- Current initiatives in K-12 and post-secondary, such as Aboriginal Enhancement plans and Post-secondary Aboriginal Service Plans, will be continued.
- Partnerships to improve urban Aboriginal literacy will be pursued.

### **OBJECTIVE 2: IMMIGRANTS IMPROVE THEIR LITERACY THROUGH TARGETED LEARNING, INCLUDING ENHANCED WORKPLACE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.**

Many immigrants are literate and highly skilled in their first language, but lack the command of English to become fully integrated socially and economically. Fifty-nine percent of immigrants scored below the desirable level on the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, mainly due to poor English skills. This compares with 32 percent of Canadian-born British Columbians.

#### **Strategies and Actions:**

- Improved access to English language services for adults will be explored.
- Workplace literacy programming for immigrants will continue to be enhanced.
- Transition from the K-12 system to college programming will be facilitated for young adult ESL learners.

### **OBJECTIVE 3: THE WORKFORCE HAS THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR SUCCESS.**

People with higher levels of literacy generally earn more and are more likely to be employed. Literacy and essential skills in the workforce are also vital to British Columbia's continued economic growth and global competitiveness.

#### **Strategies and Actions:**

Partnerships will be built with industry to promote training, expand the tools and curricula available to practitioners, and build recognition of the importance of essential skills.

- More programs to address workplace literacy needs will be developed.
- A conference on essential skills and workplace literacy will be planned.

**OBJECTIVE 4: SERVICES ARE PROVIDED FOR OTHER SELECT POPULATIONS**

The literacy levels of people in prison may also need special attention. Fifty-four percent of inmates have lower than Grade 10 levels of literacy, and 79 percent do not have a high school diploma. There is a well-established link between prison-based educational programs and decreased recidivism, as these programs ease transition to employment and further education.

**Strategies and Actions:**

- Options to expand service delivery to people in prison will be explored.

### **GOAL 3: COORDINATED, QUALITY PROGRAMS THAT PRODUCE RESULTS**

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Meeting learners' needs in the most effective and efficient manner possible requires improved coordination and communication at the government, system and community levels. More information about learner outcomes and progress is also needed.

#### **OBJECTIVE 1: THE APPROACH TO ADULT LITERACY AND LIFELONG LEARNING IS COORDINATED.**

Many ministries deliver educational programs and services for adult learners. To meet the challenges of adult literacy, all of these government programs and services must complement each other and work together efficiently and effectively. Because many organizations provide literacy programs, it is important to reduce duplication of services and fill any gaps in individual communities. Finally, each community and region has its own literacy needs that reflect its demographics and labour market: literacy and other educational programming must be tailored to meet those demands.

#### **Strategies and Actions:**

- School districts will play a key role in developing literacy plans for their districts, in partnership with their respective communities.
- Regional literacy coordinators will promote continued literacy program delivery, coordination and collaboration and proper combination of literacy programming to address regional needs.
- School districts and colleges will expand collaboration and plan regionally.
- Development of a central database of programs, resources and services available by community will be supported to allow ministries to allocate funding effectively and efficiently

#### **OBJECTIVE 2: ARTICULATED ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS ACROSS ALL DELIVERY SYSTEMS SUPPORT LEARNER SUCCESS AND PROVIDE PATHWAYS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND JOBS.**

Learners should have access to an array of programs from a range of providers that meet their needs and overcome barriers such as distance, cost and busy lives. Learners need to be able to move between programs and service delivery providers and continue to make progress. The programs they complete must be accredited and recognized by employers or for higher levels of education.

#### **Strategies and Actions:**

- Community-based literacy programs will continue to expand to help ensure there will be appropriate and accessible adult literacy programs across the province.
- Post-secondary institutions and school districts will work together closely to enhance efficiency and their ability to meet learners' needs.
- Through LearnNow BC and BCcampus, online learning will be available for all British Columbians.
- Learner transition and progression will be eased through articulated benchmarking and assessments.
- Benchmarks will be linked to workplace essential skills

#### **OBJECTIVE 3: HIGH QUALITY PROGRAMS SUPPORT LEARNERS' GOALS.**

Learners should receive the highest quality education so they can achieve their goals.

**Strategies and Actions:**

- Quality outcomes for learners will be ensured across service delivery models .
- Joint outcomes surveys will be done for public post-secondary institutions and school-based programs.
- Program and system evaluation will be undertaken.

**OBJECTIVE 4: PROGRESS IS MONITORED AND PROVIDES VALUABLE DECISION-MAKING INFORMATION.**

Better, more frequent data about progress towards the goal of adult literacy is needed at the provincial and individual levels to make sure decisions are well informed. International adult literacy surveys are done infrequently (the last two were in 1994 and 2003), thus there is a lack of accurate data about learners' progress across the province.

**Strategies and Actions:**

- A provincial system for monitoring progress of learners will be pursued.
- Surveys will monitor adult literacy progress and target programs.
- A micro-simulation model will be developed to estimate and predict provincial literacy rates to help with planning.
- A common data and accountability framework for adult basic education delivered through colleges, and adult education delivered through school districts will be pursued.. This will include performance indicators to coordinate collection of information on adult learners, monitor progress and track the movement of learners between systems and into the workforce.



**Vision: British Columbia’s adults will attain and maintain the literacy skills necessary to participate fully in the modern economy and society.**

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	MINISTRIES
REDUCED BARRIERS AND INCREASED PARTICIPATION	Stigma is reduced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public awareness/education campaign</li> <li>Outreach campaign to attract hard-to-reach populations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AVED and MEd</li> </ul>
	Accessible information on program availability is provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Database of programs and services on Internet; explore the possibility of online assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AVED and MEd</li> </ul>
	Accessible services are provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where demand warrants, explore opportunities to make the full range of literacy services increasingly accessible throughout the province</li> <li>Encourage programs offered by a variety of providers, using a myriad of models, to give learners choice</li> <li>Encourage evening, weekend and online delivery</li> <li>Support enhanced college and school district coordination of program delivery and shared services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AVED, MEd, MAG, EcDev, MEIA</li> <li>AVED and MEd</li> </ul>
	Learners are given the supports they need to succeed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore improved access to ABE and ESL at colleges, school districts and non-government organizations</li> <li>Explore opportunities to improve access for income assistance recipients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AVED, MEd and MAG</li> <li>MEIA and AVED</li> </ul>
IMPROVED LITERACY RATES FOR KEY POPULATION GROUPS	Aboriginal learners have access to culturally appropriate programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop articulated literacy curriculum relevant for Aboriginal learners</li> <li>Develop programs and curriculum for training tutors and practitioners in partnership between Aboriginal communities and educational institutions; establish a database resource centre for practitioners</li> <li>Expand community aboriginal literacy programming</li> <li>Support transition initiatives for Aboriginal learners and link with the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy and Action Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AVED</li> <li>AVED</li> <li>AVED</li> <li>AVED and MEd</li> </ul>
	Immigrants improve their literacy and English language through targeted learning opportunities, including enhanced workplace language programs and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to expand community ESL programs</li> <li>Expand support for immigrants to navigate the labour market entry system, including workplace language training</li> <li>Workplace literacy for immigrants – focus on key areas such as cab drivers, factory workers, mill workers</li> <li>Explore improved access to ESL for all requiring programs and services</li> <li>Improve transition for young adult ESL learners</li> <li>Continue development and delivery of workplace language curriculum through English language training</li> <li>Expand delivery of language training in employment bridging programs for health professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AVED, MAG and MEd</li> <li>EcDev</li> <li>AVED and EcDev</li> <li>AVED, MAG and MEd</li> <li>AVED, MEd and MAG</li> <li>EcDev and MAG</li> <li>EcDev</li> </ul>
	Workforce has the essential skill to succeed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with industry to provide tools, build partnerships, promote essential skills and link employers, unions and learners to essential skills training</li> <li>Workplace literacy/essential skills conference</li> <li>Expand workforce literacy programming – general, ESL focused, and focusing on employees affected by the mountain pine beetle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AVED (Lead), EcDev</li> <li>AVED (Lead), MEd, EcDev</li> <li>AVED and EcDev</li> </ul>
	Services are provided for other select populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore options to expand service delivery for incarcerated people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MEd, AVED and PSSG</li> </ul>
COORDINATED, QUALITY PROGRAMS THAT PRODUCE RESULTS	The approach to adult literacy and lifelong learning is coordinated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inter-ministry coordination of literacy (Provincial Literacy Plan)</li> <li>Inter-provincial coordination of adult literacy</li> <li>Coordinated community programming that meets the needs of learners in communities, districts and regions.</li> <li>Collaboration and partnerships between service delivery agents (starting with post-secondary institutions and school districts) to provide complementary and coordinated services</li> <li>Inter-ministry coordination of adult ESL training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MEd</li> <li>AVED</li> <li>MEd, AVED</li> <li>AVED and MEd</li> <li>MAG, EcDev, AVED and MEd</li> </ul>
	Articulated adult literacy programs across all delivery systems support learner success and provide clear pathways to higher education and jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standard learning outcomes, assessment and reporting for literacy programs to articulate programs to facilitate learner pathways, monitor learner success, enhance efficiency. Align with Essential Skills and IALSS for consistency</li> <li>Enhance integration of service delivery between colleges, school districts and non-government organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AVED (Lead), MEd, MAG</li> <li>MEd, AVED and MAG</li> </ul>
	High-quality programs support learners’ goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outcomes surveys for all institution and school-based programs</li> <li>Perform research, such as a student transition study, ABE/ESL cohort study, program evaluation, etc.</li> <li>Improved monitoring and reporting of individual and program results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AVED, MEd</li> <li>AVED</li> <li>AVED, MEd</li> </ul>

	<p>Progress is monitored, and provides valuable decision-making information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish performance indicators</li> <li>• Regular survey of adult literacy – select populations</li> <li>• Estimate future literacy levels based on micro simulation model</li> <li>• Develop common AVED/MEd data and accountability framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AVED</li> <li>• AVED</li> <li>• AVED</li> <li>• AVED, MEd</li> </ul>
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LEGEND:

AVED: Ministry of Advanced Education  
 MEIA: Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance  
 EcDev: Ministry of Economic Development  
 MoH: Ministry of Health

MEd: Ministry of Education  
 MAG: Ministry of Attorney General  
 PSSG: Public Safety and Solicitor General