

Bear Essentials

Theory of change



children's
HEALTH FOUNDATION
OF VANCOUVER ISLAND

What is the challenge?

Children and youth with health needs, particularly those with chronic and/or complex needs, **require interdisciplinary supports** for their ultimate well-being. But Vancouver Island families raising children with health needs **face multiple barriers** to accessing necessary resources and supports:

- **System fragmentation:** Current systems of care are **uncoordinated and fragmented**, forcing families to navigate multiple systems to piece together resources to address many of their child's needs such as access to equipment and support to travel for healthcare. Families can be left adrift in a sea of information that is too overwhelming to move forward;
- **Limited and siloed funding:** Funding for interdisciplinary supports, such as access to equipment is **limited and siloed**. As a result, families are forced to choose one essential item over another to ensure their child's healthy future. Moreover, accessing these supports often requires travel to urban centres resulting in significant costs to families over time.
- **Stress on families:** The **cost of meeting children's healthcare needs** can be significant and creates conditions that, without intervention and support, can lead to **financial hardship** and impact the **mental health of families**.



The Lidstone family, Comox



“There are so many special things Lucas needs. It’s a struggle wondering how you’re going to pay for everything. I’ve lost a lot of sleep over our finances. When we found out that Bear Essentials would help, it was such a relief. You feel like you can breathe again. We’re just so thankful that we now have the supports and the tools at our house that Lucas needs.”

- Laura, Lucas’ mom

Barriers to health care access

The children and youth that will experience these barriers most significantly include:

- Children and youth with **chronic and/or complex health needs** who may face disproportionately high needs for services and supports, and thus disproportionately high healthcare costs;
- Children living in **rural and remote communities** who face greater barriers to accessing supports when travel is required, as care is often limited to larger urban centres;
- Children living in **low income** and/or single parent households may be more vulnerable to not having their needs met;
- **Indigenous families** are more susceptible to systemic barriers, including implicit racism and stigma; and
- **Recent immigrant and refugee children** are likely to face more difficulties to receive the healthcare and support they need.

Ultimately, these barriers lead to inequitable access to supports and to poorer health outcomes for children and youth, including those with chronic and/or complex health challenges, those who live in rural and remote communities, and those from otherwise vulnerable populations/families.

The need for support



Funding for health equipment through the provincial At Home program has not increased since the program's inception in 1989. A 1989 dollar is worth \$0.56 in 2021.¹



Mileage costs from the North West Coast to Victoria for a daytrip are \$139. Many pediatric specialists are located in Victoria.²



Between 2018 and 2020, Bear Essentials supported \$1.1 million in equipment purchases. The number of Bear Essentials applications has increased from 249 in 2016-17 to 727 in 2019-20.³

Our commitment

By the end of 2025, Bear Essentials will support at least 1000 children/youth (under 19 years old) on Vancouver Island and surrounding islands to have increased access to needed healthcare services, medical/healthcare equipment, and connection to resources and community supports that will enable them to be healthy and thrive.

The program will prioritise support for those facing the most significant barriers to accessing healthcare, including those with chronic/complex health needs, those living in rural and remote communities, those from low income households, Indigenous children/youth and recent immigrant and refugee children/youth.



“There’s no question that Bear Essentials has positively impacted Emily’s life, her care, and the way that she can be a vibrant 16-year-old. She will always have challenges and she will always have complex health needs. Those can’t be taken away, but for Bear Essentials to lessen those challenges? That’s huge.”

- Holly, Emily’s mom

The Breingan family, Nanaimo



Bear Essentials intended impact

Strategies



A. Funding: Provide funding to children/youth for travel support & equipment.

B. Navigation: Educate referring professionals about the Bear Essentials program and strengthen communication pathways.

Offer system navigation to connect families with relevant resources and supports.

C. Funders network circle: Convene and facilitate a network table for healthcare funders to research, map, and analyze the Vancouver Island funding ecosystem.

Short-term outcomes

(1-2 years)

1. Access to services: Children/youth have increased access to healthcare services via travel support.

2. Access to equipment: Children/youth with chronic or complex needs have increased access to healthcare equipment.

3. Connection with referring professionals: Referring professionals are better equipped to support children and youth because of strengthened connection to Bear Essentials.

4. Connection to resources & support: Families have increased awareness of and connection to other resources, supports and services that can meet their health care needs.

5. Coordinated funding landscape: Funders operate from a shared understanding of the funding ecosystem on Vancouver Island and the role of Bear Essentials within it.

Intermediate outcomes

(2-5 years)



Children/youth: Children and youth receive necessary services/equipment in a timely manner, potentially decreasing the severity and total cost of their healthcare issues over time.

Families: Families develop a trusting relationship with the program and the Foundation and feel supported in their healthcare journey.

Funders: Strengthened engagement and collaboration between funders of child/youth healthcare needs on Vancouver Island to improve understanding and create efficiencies and advocacy opportunities for greater impact.

Long-term outcomes

(10+ years)



Improved long term health outcomes for children and youth on Vancouver Island & surrounding Islands.

Our principles

Family-centered

We are committed to ensuring that program design and implementation creates an experience for families that is clear, streamlined, and dignified.

Equity

We acknowledge that inequities exist within the healthcare system and we are committed to an ongoing journey of creating more equity through Bear Essentials.

Needs-driven & data informed

The program will use evidence and data to inform decision-making and prioritization of support for children/youth that face the greatest barriers to healthcare.

Collaborative leadership

We will actively network across the ecosystem of children and youth health on Vancouver Island and share the responsibility for improvement and system change.