



Press Release

For Immediate Release

21.02.2012

Government Destabilizing Public Library Funding

The disappearance of designated public library funding in government's new budget should cause concern in BC communities.

Public library funding was not itemized in today's budget. In each year since 2009, funding totaling \$13.7M annually has been specifically itemized for libraries in the annual provincial budget. An explicit allocation helps ensure fiscal stability that directly relates to service delivery in public libraries, while meeting the government's own goals of transparency and accountability.

"Public libraries are a provincial success story, are cost effective and competitive social capital agencies" said Christopher Kevlahan, President of the British Columbia Library Association." However, without a clear and articulated commitment in today's budget for funding, the province risks this success and ignores the informational, social, and cultural needs that libraries meet in their communities."

While the province contributes only six per cent of public library funding on average – one of the lowest levels in Canada – this contribution enables the library sector to leverage vital programs, initiatives, and innovative service delivery mechanisms. This means that both rural and urban library users can all participate in equitable service and access initiatives, so essential in our knowledge economy.

While government has provided verbal assurances that \$42M will be allocated to the public library sector over the next three fiscal years, these assurances of status quo funding are not backed by legislation, and significantly – for the first time – they are also not articulated in any public budget document.

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According to government open data, in-person public library visits have increased 30.3 per cent since 2005. In the same time period, public library's delivered 30.6 per cent more programs, virtual library visits soared by 289.3 per cent and the population served by public libraries went up 6.5 per cent to a total of over 4.4M people helped and supported in 243 communities across BC.

This growth is the result of libraries' innovative approaches to meeting community needs, and occurred despite the government's 22 per cent cut to library funding in 2009.

The current muddying of the province's commitment to public libraries and to all those community members who use libraries raises doubts about the government's commitment to build an educated, engaged and information-rich province.

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