



BCANDS Navigator Services - 2024 Showcase

What makes this model different?

A brief introduction

The British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS) is a non-profit organization that provides a wide range of support services to Indigenous people with disabilities in British Columbia. Established in 1991, BCANDS runs two key navigator programs: a Case Management Program, offering holistic, long-term support, and an RDSP Navigator Program, which helps clients access the Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) and related benefits.



Case management program



Holistic, wraparound navigation support

Unlike traditional services that focus on one need at a time, BCANDS looks at the whole picture to meet all of a person's needs. They help people with both immediate needs and long-term goals, supporting them from birth through to the end of life. By coordinating services like healthcare, education, and social support, BCANDS makes sure people with disabilities get the help they need to navigate different systems and improve all areas of their lives. The case managers are very hands-on with their support, helping with everything from filling out applications for services, to booking appointments to helping them coordinate transportation, among other things.

“We work with individuals from birth to end of life.”

Client-led* approach

BCANDS is dedicated to empowering people by letting them take the lead in their own lives. Their navigation support is client-centered, recognizing that people know their own needs best. During intake, clients guide the process, deciding which areas they want to focus on. Navigators offer help and advice without pushing solutions, giving clients the space to share their preferences and make informed choices. This approach builds trust and makes sure the support provided fits each person's unique situation and goals.

“We don't usually go out of our way to try and tell people what they need. We realize that people are usually the best ones at knowing what they're needing for themselves.”

4 * “Clients” is the term used by the organization, so we are using this term here to accurately reflect their descriptions.



Fostering independence

Along with helping people access services, the BCANDS navigation program focuses on building skills and independence for people with disabilities. By teaching clients how to navigate different systems, the program helps them become more self-sufficient and confident. This approach not only meets immediate needs but also prepares clients to handle future challenges on their own, making them more resilient and independent in the long run.

“We want to be able to build capacity in individuals and increase their abilities to do some of these things on their own.”

Indigenous-led, relationship-focused

As an Indigenous-led organization, BCANDS stands out by focusing on holistic, relationship-based support. Unlike more traditional services that may treat people like numbers, BCANDS builds trust and strong connections with clients, making sure they feel valued and understood. This trust allows clients to feel comfortable sharing their challenges, leading to better support. Rooted in Indigenous values, BCANDS takes a comprehensive approach, providing care that respects each person's unique situation and helps create a sense of community and belonging.

“Relationship-building is a crucial part of what we do. It is better to work with people when you can trust each other.”



RDSP navigator program



Extensive RDSP assistance

The BCANDS RDSP Navigator Program helps Indigenous people with disabilities in British Columbia access the Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) and Disability Tax Credit (DTC). As part of the Access RDSP partnership with Disability Alliance BC and Plan Institute, the program works to remove barriers to financial security. The navigators offer personalized help, guiding clients through applications, explaining benefits, and making sure they can access the financial resources they need for long-term stability.

Award-winning support

In February, 2019, BCANDS programs, including the Access RDSP Program, were honoured to receive the Essl Foundation's Zero Project International Award for their work within Indigenous Disability in Canada. In June 2018, the Access RDSP Program was honoured to receive the Doctors of BC's 2018 Excellence in Health Promotion Provincial Award for their work across BC.





Access RDSP

Access RDSP's mandate is to increase the number of British Columbians who have a Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) through various supports and services provided by the partnership. These include:

- RDSP information sessions for communities and organizations;
- One-to-one support with the Disability Tax Credit;
- A toll-free RDSP & disability planning hotline;
- BCANDS RDSP navigation for Indigenous individuals and families with disabilities;
- BCANDS assistance with tax filing for Indigenous Individuals and families with disabilities who are interested and eligible to open a RDSP.

Access RDSP
Change your tomorrow today





An overview



Overview of the navigator programs

BCANDS operates two separate navigation programs: a Case Management Program for holistic, long-term support, and an RDSP Navigator Program focused specifically on Registered Disability Savings Plans (RDSP). The programs serve 400-500 people each year, and welcome a diverse range of people, including those with status, non-status, Métis, and Inuit backgrounds. Both Indigenous status and disability are self-identified. People are able to just call or send an email to be connected to a case manager in one of the two programs, depending on their needs.

The case managers also act as intermediaries between clients and larger organizations, helping to simplify complex systems and paperwork for various disability benefits. They collaborate with agencies to offer a united approach to support, provide essential advocacy, and help clients apply for funding.

Case managers employ a variety of methods to support clients, aiming to be flexible so they can meet clients where they're at. They offer support over the phone, text message, email, online meetings, and in-person visits. Accessibility is a priority, so mail and fax options are also available for clients with limited access to technology. To eliminate cost barriers, a toll-free number is available. They haven't had many clients yet that have needed support in languages other than English, but they do work with an ASL interpreter to provide support for Deaf members of the community.

The support process is client-led, beginning with an intake questionnaire to identify initial needs, followed by ongoing, evolving assistance as relationships deepen. The team continuously learns and adapts, relying on up-to-date resources rather than outdated lists, to provide accurate and relevant information. They currently have a 1-2 week waiting list for navigator services.



Funding

The navigator programs at BCANDS receive their funding from a number of different sources, including Indigenous Services Canada, the BC Ministry of Health, as well as grants. This funding supports four full-time case managers, that each typically have an active case load of 60-70 clients at a given time.

Limitations & future directions

While BCANDS provides valuable support, there are certain limitations. Case managers cannot offer medical or legal advice, nor can they provide direct funding to clients, but they can connect people to resources that might help. BCANDS also maintains a politically neutral stance, meaning they won't engage with the media on behalf of clients, as it is important to them to maintain strong relationships with government agencies to better support their clients.

Due to staff limitations and a growing waitlist, navigators may not always have the ability to proactively reach out to clients they haven't heard from in a while. Interviewees emphasized that they'd love to see the program's reach extended to other provinces, as there is a high demand for these types of supports from Indigenous individuals nationwide.



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