

BUDGET
2021

StrongerBC

for everyone



STRATEGIC PLAN



Building today for a better tomorrow.

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For the past year, COVID-19 has challenged British Columbians in ways we never could have imagined. But every day, people and businesses across the province are working hard to fight the virus and get life back on track. And your government is there working with you.

To see us all through this pandemic and to build a strong, sustainable future, government's foundational principles are focused on making sure everyone in British Columbia gets access to the services they need, as well as the opportunity to build a good life for them and their families.

Government's foundational principles include:

- » Putting people first
- » Lasting and meaningful reconciliation
- » Equity and anti-racism
- » A better future through fighting climate change
- » A strong, sustainable economy that works for everyone

The Government of British Columbia is advancing these principles through *Budget 2021, A Stronger BC for Everyone*, with \$8.7 billion in budget increases over the fiscal plan. This includes new baseline funding to address increased demand for essential public services including health care, opioid and substance use prevention, public education, justice and public safety.

Government is also continuing to make progress on key priorities like child care, mental health, poverty reduction, housing and CleanBC. And throughout everything, government is continuing in our commitment to true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

As more and more people get vaccinated, hope is on the horizon. But we're not there yet. COVID-19 continues to affect every part of our lives. *Budget 2021* is responsive to our current reality. Public health restrictions and guidance are what's needed to protect us and keep us safe right now. However, many people and businesses are continuing to struggle. That is why *Budget 2021* focuses on protecting the health and safety of British Columbians, while providing the supports people and businesses need.

At the same time, it is government's responsibility to make sure our province, its people and economy are ready for a future, post-COVID world. That is why *Budget 2021* is also focused on making investments to support B.C.'s long-term economic recovery.

PROTECTING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIANS

The pandemic has reminded all of us that our health and the health of our loved ones is so precious. People want to know that health care services are there to support them if and when they need it. B.C.'s front-line health care workers have risen to the challenges the pandemic has presented. They also deserve a health care system that supports them in the important, life saving work they do.

STRENGTHENING THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Government had made great strides in improving health care services prior to the pandemic. Wait times for MRIs had been cut in half and wait times for knee and hip surgeries had been reduced. Urgent and primary care centres were opening across the province, and primary care networks were being established to provide people better health care, closer to home.

Throughout the pandemic government has spared no effort to protect people, address disruption in services and support the health system. While vaccination continues, our health system still faces extraordinary pressures. This is reflected in *Budget 2021's* historic \$2.6 billion in health care funding. This includes funding to increase capacity in diagnostic imaging and surgical care to continue to accelerate access to the surgeries people need.

Our number one health priority in 2021 is protecting people from COVID-19 and providing a vaccine to everyone who wants one as soon as possible. To make this happen we have set aside \$900 million more in the 2021/22 fiscal year for ongoing COVID-19 related health response needs, including vaccine roll-out, testing and screening, and the provision of personal protective equipment for frontline healthcare workers.

IMPROVING HEALTH SERVICES FOR SENIORS

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on everyone in British Columbia, but seniors, especially seniors in residential care, are much more vulnerable to the virus. That's why government prioritized vaccination of people living in care homes, and the staff caring for them. Vaccination has been successful in protecting seniors and stopping outbreaks even as we continue to battle the virus.

Prior to the pandemic government was hard at work addressing longstanding issues with seniors care, including repealing legislation from 2002 that illegally stripped health care workers of their rights, leading to privatization, lowered wages, and staff working at multiple care homes to make ends meet.

Despite government investing hundreds of millions into care homes in *Budget 2018* and *Budget 2019* to increase the quality of care seniors were receiving, when the pandemic hit many workers were still living on low wages and working in multiple care homes. But because work to address quality of care issues had already started, government was able to move quickly to improve safety and reduce outbreaks of COVID-19 in care homes as we waited for vaccines to be approved, produced, and delivered.

Moving forward, government will continue work to help people stay in their homes longer, and to improve the quality of residential care for everyone who needs it.

Budget 2021 includes new investments to improve seniors care by:

- » Increasing the number of care aides and other community care providers to deliver quality home care to help seniors with daily living.
- » Training and hiring up to 3,000 more health care workers, with a particular focus on helping people who have lost their jobs to skill up into a critically important frontline career.
- » Supporting the Home Health Monitoring Initiative to help people manage their health care needs at home, in a place they feel comfortable.

INVESTING IN MENTAL HEALTH AND RESPONDING TO THE OVERDOSE CRISIS

As we continue to work together to stop the spread of COVID-19 in our communities, strong supports for mental health and help with substance use have never been more important.

Many people already struggled with conditions like anxiety, and depression before the pandemic, and many more are experiencing mental health struggles due to ongoing disruption of our everyday lives.

The pandemic has also worsened another public health emergency devastating people in our communities: the overdose crisis. The pandemic has both increased the toxicity of the illegal drug supply, leading to more fentanyl poisonings, and has led to more people using alone, putting them at greater risk of death. As a result, more people died of overdose in 2020 than ever before.

Recognizing the need to address these dual crises – especially in the face of the ongoing strain caused by COVID-19 – government is investing half a billion dollars into mental health and substance use care. This is the largest investment in mental health care in B.C. history.

This historic investment builds on and expands on initiatives advanced as part of government's A Pathway to Hope mental health and substance use strategy, released in 2019.

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

COVID-19 has shown us that when we put people first, we all do better. Putting people first means providing services that are safe and accessible to everybody. It means recognizing that government has a responsibility to serve everyone – and to do this, government must design policies and services that meet diverse needs.

If people don't have money for the basics, they can't participate in our communities and they are shut out of the economy. That's not good for anybody. That's why government has a focus on putting people first – by making life more affordable, providing strong public services, and working hard to address poverty and inequality.

REDUCING POVERTY AND HELPING THOSE MOST IN NEED

Government has an important role to play in reducing poverty. That's why in 2019, government released B.C.'s first-ever poverty reduction strategy, TogetherBC. This strategy was designed to cut child poverty in half, and reduce overall poverty by 25 per cent by 2024.

Prior to the pandemic, government was well on its way to achieving these targets – with child poverty in particular falling by nearly half between 2017 and 2019. This steep reduction in the number of children living in poverty was thanks to ongoing initiatives that put money in the pockets of families, like the Child Opportunity Benefit, the Affordable Child Care Benefit, the elimination of MSP premiums and increases to minimum wage – which will be raised to \$15.20 in June.

As part of that work, *Budget 2021* provides a \$175 per month increase to income and disability assistance rates, the largest

Initiatives and investments in *Budget 2021* include increased mental health and addictions support for children and youth in both schools and the community, improving suicide prevention services, and expanding culturally safe mental health and substance use services for Indigenous peoples.

Continued operation of new supervised consumption sites and community outreach teams will keep more people safe. And, 195 new substance use treatment and recovery beds in communities throughout the province will help more people get on a path to recovery.

permanent increase in the province's history. Over 240,000 people, including 49,000 children will directly benefit from this rate increase.

Since April 2017, the monthly rate for a single person on income assistance has increased by 53% and for a single person on disability assistance by 38%.

Budget 2021 will also increase the Senior's Supplement by \$50 – the first increase since it was introduced in 1987. This increase will benefit up to 80,000 seniors on low-income, including 20,000 more seniors who will become eligible for the supplement because of the increase.

When COVID-19 hit, government acted quickly to lease more than 3,000 spaces at hotels, motels and community centres to provide temporary shelters and meal supports and to connect those experiencing homelessness with other services.

Government is continuing this work to house people in 2021/2022 by allocating funding from the Pandemic and Recovery Contingencies to extend supports and services for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

New funding in *Budget 2021* will also create another 388 new permanent shelter spaces in communities across the province.

MAKING LIFE MORE AFFORDABLE

Government recognizes that affordability is a key concern for people in every part of the province. COVID-19 has further underlined the importance of continuing to take action to build strong services and policies to support families in areas like transportation, child care and housing.

One major new initiative in *Budget 2021* that will make life more affordable for families is making public transit free for kids. Starting in September 2021, children age 12 and under will be able to access all BC Transit and TransLink transit options free of charge. This includes buses, Sky Train, Canada Line, SeaBus West Coast Express and HandyDart. This will save families in the Translink service area up to \$672 a year for each child who uses a monthly pass.

The B.C. Recovery Benefit, launched in December 2020, has been providing people with a one-time, tax-free payment of up to \$1,000 for eligible families and single parents and up to \$500 for eligible individuals. This benefit will continue to be funded in the current budget. Applications for this grant are open until June 30, 2021. By putting money directly in the pockets of people, government is working to help families navigate workplace disruptions and increased costs caused by COVID-19.

CHILD CARE

Budget 2018's \$1 billion ChildcareBC plan was the most significant child care investment in B.C.'s history. Since then:

- » Over 26,000 new child care spaces have been created or are underway in every corner of the province.
- » Fees for 69,000 child care spaces have been reduced through the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative.
- » 63,000 children from low- and middle-income families to receive up to \$1,250/month per child through the Affordable Child Care Benefit.

These investments in quality, affordable and close-to-home child care have made life better for tens of thousands of families across B.C.

These investments also meant that when COVID-19 hit, government was ready to support the sector, both with temporary emergency funding to keep child care running even with children mostly at home, but also with investments to accelerate the creation of new spaces so we are ready to support families to participate in a strong economic recovery.

The pandemic has shone a light on how critical child care is for parents – especially single parents and women – to safely go to work and support their families.

Budget 2021 further advances ChildcareBC initiatives that will increase the number of families getting child care that costs \$10 a day or less, strengthen child care for Indigenous families, add new spaces and improve wages for early childhood educators (ECE) to support the creation of high-quality child care spaces close to home.

HOUSING

Budget 2021 continues to build on and expand supports funded as part of the Homes for BC housing strategy. This ten-year plan, announced in *Budget 2018*, was funded with the biggest investment in housing in B.C. history. Since then, over 26,000 new affordable homes have been completed or are underway. Government has also taken action to crack down on tax fraud, close loopholes, help stabilize the real estate market and build partnerships for housing affordability in every B.C. community.

Budget 2021 will significantly expand low-cost project financing through the HousingHub. HousingHub will be able to support the development almost 9,000 units of affordable rental housing and home ownership opportunities for middle income British Columbians over the next three to five years.

Over the course of the fiscal plan, the Province will provide grants and \$1.6 billion in capital investments to non-profit housing providers to support the construction of more low- and middle-income housing.

These housing investments are aimed at moving us closer to the goal of a province where everyone is able to find a secure, safe and affordable home that meets their needs.

INVESTING IN THE SERVICES BRITISH COLUMBIANS COUNT ON

Delivering high quality public services is a key measure of a government's focus on putting people first. As outlined in the first section of this document, investing in healthcare, improving care for seniors and supports for people with mental health or addictions challenges right now is critical as we continue to tackle two public health emergencies in our province.

This budget also provides funding for essential public services, which includes support for:

- » Students, teachers, and schools in the K-12 education system.
- » Family, children and youth services, including investments that help provide alternatives to ministry care by keeping children connected to families and communities.
- » Adults with development disabilities, including funding to expand services for more than 1,000 new people a year.
- » Public safety initiatives and institutions, such as the Gang Suppression Action Plan, BC Coroners Service, and the Office of the Fire Commissioner.

LASTING AND MEANINGFUL RECONCILIATION

Government is deeply committed to true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. That's why government introduced and passed the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. This Act recognizes and respects the human rights of Indigenous peoples and ensures they are involved in decisions that affect them, their communities and their territories.

Budget 2021 includes funding to support Indigenous participation in land and resource activities, negotiations and engagement on legislation, policy, and programs, as well the continued implementation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.

Government is also continuing to invest in skills training for Indigenous people. Through this additional funding, more than 1,000 people will have the opportunity to gain new skills, and transfer their knowledge to new jobs while supporting their families and contributing to economic recovery in their communities. This funding is being delivered through Indigenous communities and organizations, allowing for Indigenous peoples and communities to determine their priority training needs.

EQUITY AND ANTI-RACISM

Racism and other forms of discrimination are a serious problem in British Columbia, and they require a coordinated response across government.

Government has a responsibility to design programs and initiatives in a way that is inclusive of everyone. That's why government has incorporated Gender- Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) into its policy and budget process, including the process for *Budget 2021*. Since 2018, the province has used this intersectional analysis tool to ensure that comprehensive, evidence-based policy advice is provided to decision makers to achieve better results for everyone in our province.

Providing services people can count on means providing services that are fair and equitable. That's why *Budget 2021* includes funding to support a justice system that provides timely and equitable access to justice. This funding will help make services more inclusive for women, visible minorities, single parents, refugee claimants, Indigenous peoples, those with low incomes or who live in poverty, and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Work is underway on new anti-racism legislation for British Columbia. This legislation will also allow race-based data collection, which is essential as part of monitoring how systems

Government has the responsibility to make sure that public services are culturally safe and inclusive. The recent *In Plain Sight* report on anti-Indigenous racism in B.C.'s health care system showed we still have work to do.

As part of that work, health care funding in *Budget 2021* includes \$45 million over three years to expand First Nations cultural safety and humility training and Indigenous liaisons within each regional health authority. Addressing systemic racism against Indigenous people in the health care system will take training, education, and prioritizing hiring of a more diverse health care workforce that better reflects all the people of B.C.

Government recognizes that anti-Indigenous racism is not confined to health care. That's why we are addressing diversity and inclusion within the public service as a whole, as well as investing in Indigenous-specific and Indigenous-led programs.

As part of expanding access to culturally safe services, *Budget 2021* adds 400 more Indigenous child care spaces through the Aboriginal Head Start Program and invests in culturally specific mental health and substance use care.

like policing, health care and education treat people from different backgrounds.

The *In Plain Sight* report documented anti-Indigenous racism in the province's health care system. We don't have to investigate each and every sector to know that racism and other forms of discrimination are a problem that needs to be addressed in every part of government. That's why government is also moving forward with a framework to address systemic racism in B.C.'s education system.

Budget 2021 introduces the largest permanent increase to disability assistance rates in the province's history and expands support for adults with developmental disabilities and their families.

Support for British Columbians with disabilities needs to go further by actively addressing the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from full participation in services, programs and society. That is why this spring, government is introducing accessibility legislation.

Government is also eliminating the discriminatory lower wage for liquor servers, 80% of whom are women, on June 1 of this year.

A BETTER FUTURE THROUGH FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

Even through the pandemic, people in British Columbia continue to focus on doing their part to tackle climate change. This year B.C. passed a significant milestone – with more than 50,000 electric cars on the road. This province now has a greater percentage of our personal vehicle fleet running on electricity than in any other jurisdiction.

CleanBC is about protecting everything that makes our province special – the land, the people, our communities – from the threats posed by climate change.

Budget 2021 continues our journey on the path to a cleaner, better future – with more than \$500 million of new investments in the CleanBC climate strategy. These investments include new operating and capital funding for clean transportation, energy

efficient buildings and communities, and other cleantech and climate change initiatives that will help us continue to create clean-energy jobs and opportunities for people, while protecting our clean air, land and water. It also includes a new PST exemption for electric bicycles – helping more people access this clean and affordable way of getting around.

In addition to investments in CleanBC, government continues to invest in a lower carbon future through upgrading the energy efficiency of public sector buildings, through continuing to fund transit improvements, including the Broadway Subway, and with funds and programs like the Innovative Clean Energy Initiative and the First Nations Clean Energy Business Fund.

A STRONG, SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

SUPPORTING BC BUSINESSES THROUGH COVID-19

COVID-19 has disrupted lives and businesses in every part of the province. Government's StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan is already providing digital marketing training, to help businesses connect to customers online, and delivering grants to businesses that have lost revenue because of the pandemic.

Budget 2021 provides funding to continue initiatives from StrongerBC, including employment incentives, and recovery grants of up to \$30,000 for businesses to support them through COVID-19.

This funding is being used by businesses to diversify and offer more services, to renovate, to offset the cost of rent, and to grow by moving their businesses online. Tourism businesses, which have been particularly hard hit by COVID-19, are eligible for an additional \$15,000.

TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

Tourism is one of the biggest employers in B.C. The sector is particularly important to women, youth, and Indigenous peoples, who make up a greater proportion of the tourism workforce compared to the overall labour force. It is also one of the areas of employment hardest hit by COVID-19.

As part of the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan, government dedicated \$100 million of the Small and Medium Sized Business Recovery Grant program to tourism operators.

There was also over \$70 million invested in the 2020/21 fiscal year for other tourism supports, including for grants for Indigenous-owned tourism businesses and investments to help small municipalities improve and build amenities such as trails and visitor centres.

Budget 2021 builds on these StrongerBC initiatives with an additional \$120 million for tourism recovery, including increased funding for local development grants to build rail trails, rest stops, and airport improvements. These programs are providing people with work today and improving amenities for tomorrow.

This investment will also support our province's anchor attractions, to ensure they are ready for when we welcome visitors back to British Columbia.

Government is also permanently allowing restaurants, bars and tourism operators with liquor licenses to purchase beer, wine, and spirits at the wholesale price, helping alleviate financial pressures and support hospitality businesses in recovering from COVID-19.

AGRICULTURE

From the very beginning of the pandemic government recognized the need to protect and strengthen our food supply, including by supporting the farmers and workers who produce, manufacture and deliver food to our communities. That's why the StrongerBC plan also included support for B.C. agri-tech companies, supply chain grants to strengthen B.C.'s supply chain, and support for small-and medium-sized manufacturing businesses scale up, develop new products, and connect with more customers.

Budget 2021 invests another \$10 million to expand the Grow BC, Feed BC, Buy BC strategies launched in 2018. This funding builds the investments in food hubs from the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan. These food hubs provided shared access to commercial equipment and facilities to support smaller scale food producers and processors in innovating and expanding their businesses.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Like people who work in tourism, people who work in arts and culture have been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

That's why government is doubling the budget for the Arts Infrastructure Program. This program will provide increased grants of up to \$250,000 to arts and culture organizations to support the purchase or construction of new spaces and the expansion of existing spaces. This program also offers funding for accessibility improvements and supports the purchase of specialized equipment.

This new funding in *Budget 2021* builds on the \$35 million in financial relief for artists and arts and culture organizations that was delivered as part of the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan.

Government also recently announced funding through AmplifyBC to support people and businesses in B.C.'s music industry plan for the future.

PREPARING FOR RECOVERY

The pandemic has affected us all, but it hasn't affected us all equally. That's why government is delivering both broad relief and targeted programs to put our province on track for a strong recovery from COVID-19.

One way government is investing in the future is with the InBC Strategic Investment Fund. Initially announced as part of the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan, this investment fund is being financed with half a billion dollars over three years in *Budget 2021*. This independent investment fund will help grow the B.C. economy, while meeting our province's social and environmental priorities. It will also help attract businesses, talent and bring good jobs to B.C.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Youth have been particularly hard hit by job losses caused by COVID-19. That's why government is supporting youth and young adults across British Columbia with access to skills training and well-paid jobs through the StrongerBC Future Leaders Program. This includes targeted employment opportunities for youth through a number of programs and initiatives funded by *Budget 2021*.

The province is directly increasing job opportunities through funding to expand co-op positions in the natural resources sector. This investment will create employment opportunities for young people while improving knowledge and data about the land base.

The Innovator Skills Initiative program is funding businesses to provide 3,000 new job placements for youth in the tech sector, which has higher-than-average wages.

Funding is provided to extend the Recreation Sites and Trails BC youth program and youth employment opportunities with BC Parks and the Conservation Officer Services, first launched as part of government's StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan. These programs improve the safety and quality of recreation opportunities for the public by developing, maintaining and managing the provincial network of recreational sites and trails, including in the BC Parks system, as well as support responsible environmental stewardship.

Young people will also have expanded opportunities through the Aquatic Invasive Species program, and through the continuation of the Clean Coast, Clean Waters program, which is removing garbage from beaches and waters near our communities.

As part of *Budget 2021*, government is also providing funding to help nearly 3,000 students whose employment prospects have been affected by COVID-19 with work-integrated learning placements. This funding will be used to schools as they work with employers to access federal and provincial funding to provide job opportunities.

INVESTING IN COMMUNITIES AND BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

One of the ways government is preparing for a strong recovery from COVID-19 is by investing in new and upgraded infrastructure that benefits people and boosts our communities.

Government is making a strategic investment in the future of the province with a record \$26.4 billion capital plan. This record taxpayer-supported capital spending over three years is \$3.5 billion higher than *Budget 2020* with infrastructure recovery investments in the areas of health, education and transportation.

These investments in new schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, housing and other infrastructure for communities will help government deliver the services people count on, while creating jobs that support a strong and sustainable economy.

As part of these investments, government is providing apprenticeship and training opportunities, many of them especially aimed at helping traditionally under represented groups such as Indigenous peoples, women, and people with disabilities build a career in the skilled trades.

Overall, government's infrastructure investments are expected to create over 85,000 direct and indirect jobs over the three years of the plan.

Connectivity is critical for British Columbians regardless of where they live. The internet is embedded into all aspects of our day-to-day lives as it enables people to connect to important services including healthcare, education, culture, public safety and economic activity.

When the pandemic hit, with more people working from home and spending more time at home, connectivity became even more critical to all of our lives. That is why government worked with our federal partners to accelerate connectivity projects, to get more communities on-line so people can work and study from home – from every part of the province.

Recognizing how critical connectivity is to communities, for the first time ever *Budget 2021* includes stable base funding to improve on and expand broadband and cellular access throughout British Columbia. This \$40 million commitment builds on the Province's recent investments of \$140 million.

Government also continues to partner with the federal government to fund local community projects throughout B.C. through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. Together, the federal government and the Province have committed \$7.5 billion to support public transit; green infrastructure; community, culture and recreation; and for projects to boost rural and northern communities over 10 years. *Budget 2021* commits \$41 million in provincial funding for this program – to continue to support First Nations, local governments, and not-for-profits in accessing community infrastructure funding.

The pandemic has changed life in every part of the province. As we've had to scale back indoor activities, people in communities around B.C. have been appreciating parks and outdoor

recreational activities more than ever. To reflect the substantial increase in attendance at B.C. Parks during the pandemic, *Budget 2021* is providing B.C. Parks with capital and operating funding to create new and upgraded campsites and trails. This funding will also be used to improve accessibility for people using wheels – whether they are in a wheelchair or pushing a stroller – these new and upgraded trails will let people wheel their way to outdoor adventure.

INVESTING IN EDUCATION AND SKILLS TRAINING

Another way that government is investing in the future and a strong, sustainable economy is by investing in people through education and skills training. Providing people with the opportunity to upgrade their skills and start new careers in higher wage and higher demand sectors is an important part of government's recovery strategy.

That's why *Budget 2021* continues funding for training opportunities started as part of the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan, including maintaining Indigenous skills training opportunities and continuing to support the long-term needs of the health sector through training people to transition to these in-demand jobs.

The Province is also expanding funding for micro-credentials. This approach to teaching and verifying in-demand skills through shorter, more flexible programs, is helping people develop and prove their competencies so they can access better job opportunities.

Initial funding provided as part of the StrongerBC plan is being used to deliver 25 micro-credential courses for up to 2,000 students. New funding provided by *Budget 2021* will allow for the development of an additional 30 courses.

The last year has shown us the value of strong public services and a society where people support each other. It's demonstrated how investing in programs like health care, child care and housing is investing in healthy communities and a strong, sustainable economy that works for everyone.

Getting back on track after COVID-19 will take all of us working together. It will take us looking out for each other, and giving a hand up to people who have been knocked down by the pandemic. *Budget 2021* is about helping people now, and creating the conditions for a strong economic recovery.

We live in a province filled with resilient people and we will get through this. B.C.'s recovery won't happen overnight, but by focusing on the things that matter most to people, we'll keep making progress.

Better days are ahead. Together, we will emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever.

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