



POLICY PROPOSAL

A Vulnerable Persons Alert for British Columbia

A proposal to amend the Missing Persons Act, SBC 2014, c 2, to create a Vulnerable Persons Alert for missing British Columbians of any age who cannot keep themselves safe, connected to the national alerting system the province already uses.

Prepared for consideration by the Government of British Columbia

Submitted by Parent Partnership Project Inc.

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A VULNERABLE PERSONS ALERT FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Executive Summary

When a British Columbian who cannot keep themselves safe goes missing, British Columbia has no standing alert pathway built for that purpose. Police can make information about a missing person public under the Missing Persons Act, and the province takes part in the national alerting system, but there is no dedicated alert for missing vulnerable persons who do not meet AMBER Alert criteria. An autistic child who bolts toward water, an adult with a brain injury who becomes lost, a parent with dementia who walks out at night: none fits the AMBER Alert, which is built for abductions. The provincial government committed in 2020 to create a Silver Alert for missing seniors, and PPP has not found that any such alert has been put in place.

This proposal recommends that British Columbia amend the Missing Persons Act to create a single Vulnerable Persons Alert. Eligibility would turn on what a person can and cannot do, not on age or diagnosis. The alert would use the alerting system British Columbia already takes part in, and would not require a new system, a new brand of alert for each condition, or new infrastructure.

Two drafts are attached for the government's consideration: an amending Bill and a companion amendment to the Missing Persons Regulation. Both are discussion drafts for legislative counsel, and both identify the points that need legal verification.

1. Background

1.1 What the Missing Persons Act provides today

The Missing Persons Act gives police services tools to find a missing person: record access orders, search orders, emergency demands for records, and limited authority to make information public. Its definition of a missing person has no age restriction. It includes an individual whose whereabouts are unknown despite reasonable efforts to locate them and whose safety or welfare is feared for given their age, physical or mental capabilities, or the circumstances of the absence. Section 21(3) lets a police service, for a missing person investigation, make public the person's name, age, description and photograph, medical information that poses a serious or immediate health threat, where they were last seen, and other information the police service considers appropriate.

The Act also recognizes two groups at heightened risk. A “vulnerable person” is an individual under a formal legal arrangement, such as a committee, a representation agreement or a support and assistance plan. A “person at risk” is a missing person whom a member of a police service has assessed as at risk under section 3 of the Missing Persons Regulation, which lists factors such as a need for medication or being unprepared for the weather or terrain. Neither term creates an alert. The Act as consolidated to October 6, 2026 contains no alert provision of any kind.

1.2 A Silver Alert promised and not delivered

An alert for missing vulnerable persons has been proposed in British Columbia for more than a decade. In 2014 a private member's bill, the Silver Alert Act, was introduced in the Legislature and did not advance. In 2020 the provincial government committed to create a Silver Alert system for

missing seniors, and the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General was directed to oversee its development. In July 2023 the minister said the government still wanted such a system, but had not settled how to implement it or how to target small areas. In May 2025 it was reported that the RCMP's Missing Persons Centre was working with the province on a public assistance alert for people who go missing and may be vulnerable because of cognitive impairment or other health-related concerns. PPP has not found that either system has been launched.

In the meantime, the Silver Alert Society of British Columbia, a citizen-led non-profit founded in 2014, has advocated for community alerting for missing vulnerable persons and worked with police, search and rescue and researchers. Its work shows sustained public demand. It is not a provincial alert and carries no legal authority.

Two points follow. First, a commitment is not an alert: the province has wanted one since 2020 and British Columbians still have no alert of this kind. Second, the Silver Alert model is framed around older adults. An alert for seniors would not reach a missing child or a younger adult facing the same danger.

1.3 The elopement case in Calgary from summer 2026

On July 16, 2026, an 11-year-old nonspeaking autistic boy went missing from a day home in Calgary. Because the case did not meet the usual threshold for an AMBER Alert, an emergency alert was not issued until July 18, two days later, and only after the Government of Alberta granted a case-specific exemption. The search ended on July 29, 2026, when he was found deceased. Under the current framework, a child in this situation reaches the public only through an exemption granted case by case, not through a standing category built for the purpose.

British Columbia has the same gap. A child in this situation in British Columbia would have no standing alert category built for the purpose.

1.4 Other jurisdictions are acting

On August 10, 2026, Alberta announced it would engage law enforcement, disability advocates, and community partners on emergency alert processes for missing vulnerable persons, including a review of its AMBER Alert criteria. PPP took part in Alberta's listening sessions in fall 2026 and has prepared a companion proposal for Alberta on the same model as this one. A common functional test across provinces would mean that a person who crosses a provincial boundary is assessed the same way on both sides of it.

1.5 The federal context

Bill C-263, the Silver Alert National Framework Act, passed second reading in the House of Commons on June 5, 2026 and is before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. It followed the disappearance of Earl Moberg, an 81-year-old Winnipeg man living with dementia who went missing in December 2023 and was never found. The bill is framed around older adults.

PPP has separately asked the Government of Canada to support a national standard for a Vulnerable Persons Alert that covers children and adults under one functional test. Canada's alerting standard already contains an event code for a missing vulnerable person, called missingVPer. That code is not currently on the list of events that receive Broadcast Immediate distribution, the treatment that interrupts phones, television and radio. A British Columbia amendment would fit the national work and would not depend on it.

2. Problem Statement

People go missing in British Columbia every year whose lives are at immediate risk because they cannot recognize danger, say where they are, or get back to safety. The Alzheimer's Association estimates that about 6 in 10 people living with dementia will wander at least once. A 2012 study in Pediatrics found, in a parent-reported U.S. survey, that 598 of 1,218 autistic children (49 percent) had attempted to elope from a safe environment at least once after age four. A 2022 Government of Canada news release states that if a person with Alzheimer's disease is not found within 12 hours, there is a 50 percent chance they will be found injured or dead.

Comparable serious risks can arise from different forms of functional vulnerability, regardless of age or diagnosis. British Columbia's coastline, rivers, mountain terrain and distances between communities add to them. The province has no standing alert for these cases, and the Silver Alert it committed to in 2020 has not been put in place.

3. Policy Objective

To ensure that when any British Columbian goes missing who cannot keep themselves safe, and the public could help find them, police have clear legal authority to alert the public quickly, in the right area, with only the information needed, regardless of the person's age or diagnosis.

4. Proposed Solution

PPP recommends a targeted amendment to the Missing Persons Act that adds a Vulnerable Persons Alert as a new Part, with a companion amendment to the Missing Persons Regulation for the operational details. The amendment does not create a Silver Alert or a separate alert for each condition. It creates one alert for everyone a Silver Alert would have covered and everyone it would have left out.

4.1 Who qualifies, and when the public is alerted

The test has two parts, which PPP's national proposal calls gates.

Gate	What it triggers	What must be true
Gate 1	The sustained, enhanced police and search response	The person is missing, functionally vulnerable, and at a materially elevated, time-sensitive risk of death or serious bodily harm
Gate 2	The public alert	The public can usefully help, and a defensible alert area exists

Gate 1 describes the enhanced operational response proposed in PPP's national standard. The British Columbia legislation provides the complementary provincial alert authority and safeguards.

- Functional vulnerability means a limitation that materially impairs a person's ability to recognize danger, communicate, seek help, or return to safety. Dementia, a medical condition, a developmental disability, autism spectrum disorder, acquired brain injury and young age are illustrative, non-exhaustive examples.
- The search never waits for the alert decision. Urgent search measures begin on reasonable suspicion, before either gate is formally decided.
- No minimum time missing is required. A child heading toward water should not have to be missing for a set number of minutes.
- Age and diagnosis are never the test. They can inform how the search is run, but they neither qualify nor disqualify anyone.
- Not every vulnerable missing person generates a public alert.

4.2 Building on the person-at-risk assessment

British Columbia already requires police to assess whether a missing person is a person at risk under the Missing Persons Act and its Regulation. The companion Regulation would expressly include functional vulnerability among the factors considered in that assessment. Where a missing person is assessed as at risk, police may seek the investigative orders available under the Act, subject to the applicable statutory requirements and any required judicial authorization. This assessment would also inform, but would not replace, the separate decision about whether to authorize a Vulnerable Persons Alert.

4.3 Who decides

Under the draft Bill, a police service authorizes the alert, as with an AMBER Alert. The alert is then issued by that police service where it is authorized to issue alerts, or at its request by another authorized authority. In British Columbia, AMBER Alerts are issued by the RCMP on behalf of the police of jurisdiction, and the draft accommodates that arrangement without fixing it in statute. Before

authorizing, the police service must consider whether an alert would itself endanger the person or someone else, or interfere with an investigation.

4.4 Safeguards

- **Geographic targeting.** Alerts are geographically targeted to the smallest defensible area likely to support an effective public response. Broader distribution, including province-wide alerting, requires an operational justification and should be reassessed as new information becomes available.
- **Minimum necessary content.** An alert says only what the public needs to help. A diagnosis is normally excluded, and is disclosed only where necessary and lawful.
- **Adult autonomy and consent.** Where the missing person is an adult, police consider available evidence that the person left voluntarily and can keep themselves safe. A located adult's whereabouts must not be publicly disclosed without consent unless disclosure is otherwise authorized by law.
- **Review and cancellation.** Alerts are reviewed at prescribed intervals and updated when circumstances materially change. The alert is cancelled or updated as soon as the person is located, whatever the outcome, and is cancelled if the conditions for continued alerting are no longer met.
- **Recorded decisions.** Authorization decisions, including decisions not to issue an alert, are documented with the reasons and information available at the time.
- **Public reporting.** Use is reported every year, and audits check both alerts that should not have issued and cases where an alert should have issued and did not. Reporting includes cases where an alert was considered and not authorized. Police services report to the responsible minister, and the minister publishes aggregated reporting in a manner that protects personal information and operationally sensitive details.
- **Mandatory review.** The arrangements are reviewed within three years of coming into force.

4.5 How the alert reaches the public

The draft Bill provides for dissemination through the system by which British Columbia participates in the National Public Alerting System, in accordance with the requirements that apply to that system. Whether a Vulnerable Persons Alert interrupts phones, television and radio depends on national decisions about the Broadcast Immediate list, which are outside the Legislature's authority. Distribution to phones and broadcasters runs through federally regulated distributors under CRTC requirements. Provincial legal authority does not by itself establish that reach, which is why the national pieces matter. The British Columbia amendment supplies the provincial legal authority and decision rules, so that the province is ready to use that treatment when it is available and can use its other channels in the meantime.

4.6 Coming into force

The draft Bill comes into force by regulation, as British Columbia amending Acts usually do, so that provisions can be brought in as the Regulation, training and alerting arrangements are ready. It also sets a fixed latest date, so that an alert the province first committed to in 2020 cannot wait indefinitely.

4.7 One alert, not two

If the RCMP's public assistance alert work proceeds, the draft Bill could provide a common statutory test, safeguards and public reporting for alerts of that kind across every police service in the province. How far it would support each element of the RCMP initiative depends on a comparison of that initiative with the draft Bill and existing authorities. PPP recommends that the two be brought together so that British Columbia has one alert for missing vulnerable persons.

5. Evidence and Precedent

5.1 Alberta

Alberta passed Silver Alert amendment legislation in 2017 and again in 2023, with the later legislation specifying an age threshold of 55 years or older. The Silver Alert provisions do not appear in the consolidated Missing Persons Act current to June 11, 2025, and PPP has not found evidence that they have been brought into force.

Legal authority is not the same as reach. A province can legislate an alert without that alert ever reaching a phone. An age-limited alert would also leave out missing children and younger adults who face comparable risks.

5.2 Manitoba

Manitoba legislated a Silver Alert in 2017. Eligibility is limited to adults: vulnerable persons as defined in Manitoba law, and other adults with a cognitive impairment. The disappearance of Earl Moberg showed a second limit. His family later said publicly that the alert went out through news media and did not reach people who were not already following the news that evening.

5.3 United States

The U.S. Ashanti Alert Act of 2018 created an adult-focused framework based on disability, endangerment or involuntary disappearance. In 2024 the Federal Communications Commission added a Missing and Endangered Persons event code to that country's emergency alert systems. It is the nearest technical parallel to what PPP proposes for missingVPer. The code has been technically enabled since September 2025; whether and how often alert originators use it is not confirmed.

5.4 What no reviewed jurisdiction combines

Pieces of this model exist in other jurisdictions. PPP's review did not find a single jurisdiction that combines age-neutral eligibility, a functional test, and Broadcast Immediate delivery.

No study yet shows that an interrupting phone alert improves recovery for these cases. That is why the draft Bill and Regulation require documented activation decisions, annual public reporting and a review within three years.

PPP's companion document, *The Research Behind the Campaign: An Evidence Base for the Vulnerable Persons Alert Proposal*, describes the supporting evidence and its limitations.

6. Stakeholder Consultation (Recommended)

Before introduction, PPP recommends consulting, at minimum:

- Municipal police departments, the Stl'atl'imx Tribal Police Service, the BC Association of Chiefs of Police, and RCMP "E" Division, including its Missing Persons Centre
- 9-1-1 and dispatch services, including E-Comm
- The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness
- Search and rescue organizations, including the BC Search and Rescue Association
- The Silver Alert Society of British Columbia and families of missing persons
- Alzheimer Society of B.C.
- Inclusion BC
- Autism organizations operating in British Columbia
- Brain injury and other disability service organizations
- Autistic self-advocates, people with lived experience, and family and caregiver representatives
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit governments and organizations, and rural and remote communities
- The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia
- British Columbia broadcasters and telecommunications carriers that distribute alerts

7. Implementation Considerations

- Legislation: one amending Bill adding a new Part to the Missing Persons Act.
- Regulation: new sections of the Missing Persons Regulation covering decision factors, authorization, escalation where a family's request is declined, targeting, dissemination, content, review, co-ordination, records, reporting, audit, post-incident review, training and review within three years, and one added factor in the existing person-at-risk assessment.
- Police: designated decision-makers available at all times; training for them and for those who take missing-person reports.

- Alerting: arrangements with the provincial alerting authorities for issuing, updating and cancelling alerts, building on the RCMP's existing role in issuing AMBER Alerts.
- National: alignment with federal, provincial and territorial work on the Broadcast Immediate list and a national operational standard.

PPP has drafted a Model First Responder Training & Local Implementation Manual and a Proposed National Vulnerable Persons Alert (VPA) Operational Standard: Discussion Draft, which British Columbia may use as starting points.

8. Fiscal Considerations

British Columbia already participates in an established public alerting infrastructure. This proposal would build on that infrastructure rather than establish a separate alerting network. Additional implementation and operating costs, including consultation, drafting, training, dispatch and alert-authoring changes, and annual reporting, have not yet been determined. PPP has asked the Government of Canada for time-limited federal funding to help provinces and territories align training, dispatch systems and implementation with a national standard.

9. Recommendation

PPP recommends that the Government of British Columbia:

- support an amendment to the Missing Persons Act creating a Vulnerable Persons Alert, with eligibility based on functional vulnerability and risk and not on age or diagnosis;
- refer the attached draft Bill and draft Regulation to legislative counsel as discussion drafts, including the verification points listed in their drafter's notes;
- bring the RCMP's public assistance alert work and this amendment together, so that the province has one alert;
- consult the organizations listed in section 6 before introduction; and
- take part in federal, provincial and territorial work on a national Vulnerable Persons Alert standard, so that British Columbia's alert can receive Broadcast Immediate distribution when that treatment is available.

PPP requests a written response identifying the provincial officials or bodies responsible for considering these recommendations, the next procedural steps, and an anticipated timeline for an initial decision or further engagement.

Who We Are

Parent Partnership Project Inc. (PPP) is a parent-led not-for-profit organization based in Calgary, Alberta, incorporated under the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act. It produces free resources and pursues both direct family support and systemic policy advocacy for families of children and adults with disabilities. PPP has advocated on systemic issues facing vulnerable persons since 2018.

Appendices

Appendix A: Draft Missing Persons Amendment Act, 2026 (Vulnerable Persons Alerts)

Appendix B: Draft amendment to the Missing Persons Regulation, B.C. Reg. 111/2015

Both appendices are provided as separate attached documents. This proposal is one of fourteen prepared by PPP: one federal, and one for each of the ten provinces and three territories.

Sources

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- Silver Alert Society of British Columbia: <https://bcsilveralert.ca/>
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- LiveWire Calgary, July 18, 2026: <https://livewirecalgary.com/2026/07/18/emergency-alert-issued-in-11-year-old-calgary-boys-disappearance/>
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- Manitoba, The Missing Persons Amendment Act (Silver Alert), S.M. 2017, c. 29: <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/2017/c02917e.php>
- U.S. Ashanti Alert Act of 2018; Federal Communications Commission, Report and Order FCC 24-83, adopted August 7, 2024.
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- SOREM Broadcast Immediate Events List, Version 2.1, amended May 26, 2022.