

August 02, 2011

Q: What is the new CIHR policy and how does it affect me?

A: Beginning September 1, 2011, CIHR care providers who have *not* been screened previously (along with any other adults in the home aged 18 and older) will need to agree to a criminal record check, as well as a check for previous involvement with the child welfare system, in order to continue to receive benefits under the CIHR program.

This change in policy only affects families who were receiving CIHR benefits before December 1, 2007, when the Ministry of Children and Family Development made screening checks a requirement for all new applications. If you applied for CIHR benefits after that date, there will be no need for you to be re-screened.

Q: How do I agree to the screening?

The Ministry of Children and Family Development recently sent letters to all CIHR care providers affected by the change. The letter explains the new policy and includes copies of the consent form for the criminal record and prior contact check.

The CIHR care provider (along with any other adults in the home) need to sign the consent forms and appear in person at their local Ministry of Social Development office before September 30, 2011. People need to appear in person just to confirm the identity of the person who signed the consent form.

If you were accepted to the program before December, 2007, and have not received a letter by August 10, please call MCFD's toll-free line at 1-800-663-9122.

Q: When does the policy change take effect?

A: Starting September 1, 2011, the Ministry of Children and Family Development will begin the process of screening the CIHR care providers and other adults in their homes.

Q: Why is the ministry making a policy change now?

A: The Ministry of Children and Family Development reviewed the decision to begin screening all CIHR applicants in December, 2007, and decided that it was in the best interests of the children to screen all CIHR care providers who have not already been screened.

Q: If family members have been caring for a child/children for three years or more without incident, isn't this an invasion of their privacy?

A: This decision was not meant to raise questions about the excellent and generous care being provided by family members to children in this province. The Ministry of Children and Family Development has an obligation to ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth in this province. That is a responsibility that the ministry takes very seriously. The ministry's goal is to ensure every single child in British Columbia is safe.

Ensuring that all CIHR recipients are screened will help identify circumstances where families could benefit from additional supports, or where there may be risk to a child and where there may be a need for child welfare worker involvement.

Q: What will happen if the review process turns up a child protection concern?

A: The Province's goal is not to take a child away from their family, but to make sure they are safe and, if necessary, have the supports in place that they need.

The CIHR screening looks at prior contacts that adults in the home may have had with child welfare, police, corrections and court databases against a list of 62 specific Criminal Code offences associated with physical and sexual abuse.

The ministry's response will depend on the specific nature of the concern. If there is a concern identified about the child's safety in the home, then the Ministry of Children and Family Development will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the child is safe. Those steps may include additional family or individual supports.

Q: What is considered a threat? What are the screening reviews looking for?

A: The screening checks look at prior contacts that anyone 18 and older in the home may have had with child welfare, and, examines police, corrections and court databases against a list of 62 specific Criminal Code offences associated with physical and sexual abuse.

Q: If, for example, a grandparent providing care was convicted of impaired driving a decade ago or a cousin in the home was found guilty of shoplifting, would that prompt the ministry to remove a child from the home?

A: Neither of the charges mentioned above is included on the list of Criminal Code offences that we check to determine a child's safety.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development's goal is not to intrude in the homes and lives of families receiving CIHR benefits, but to ensure that there are no apparent risks to the children living with them. The ministry is only interested in something that may represent a threat to a child's safety. Each case will be reviewed and evaluated individually.

Q: How long will it take to screen everyone?

A: The plan is to begin screening families who care for the youngest and most vulnerable children first.

With about 1,800 children in the CIHR program, each living with possibly two or more adults in the home, it could take up to seven months to finish the record checks. *During this time, CIHR care providers who have consented to the screening will continue to receive financial assistance.*

Individuals who have not consented to the screening will no longer be eligible for CIHR benefits.

Q: How will I know the results of the screening?

A: If there are any child protection concerns, a child welfare worker will get in touch with you to follow-up. In the vast majority of cases, no concerns will be raised and families will continue to receive financial assistance without any further action required.

Q: What does it mean if there is a follow-up on the screening results?

A: If child protection concerns are identified, it doesn't automatically mean the family's income assistance will be discontinued. In some cases, the family may get additional forms of family and individual services from the Ministry of Children and Family Development or a Delegated Aboriginal Agency.

Q: What happens if the family refuses to cooperate with the screening process? Will the ministry initiate an investigation into why?

A: We know this process may be uncomfortable for some families, but the ministry shares the same goal as the the families – ensuring that these children are safe and well supported. If a family chooses not to participate in the screening, they will no longer be eligible for CIHR benefits and the Ministry of Children and Family Development will not require anything further.

Unless someone – a teacher, neighbor or family member, for example – makes a report to either the Ministry of Children and Family Development or a Delegated Aboriginal Agency with reason to believe that a child is in some sort of danger, the ministry does not have the legal authority to begin a child protection response.

Q: What happens to the child or children in my care if I or another adult in my home doesn't pass the criminal record check?

A: If concerns are raised about something found during the screening process, a social worker may visit the home. In most cases, support from the social worker and an agreed upon plan can address safety concerns.

Only in extremely rare cases would the ministry consider placing the child somewhere else. This difficult decision would take into account a number of factors including the type of concern, when the situation occurred and how it was resolved, the age of the child and any history with the Ministry of Children and Family Development. This is a last resort,

though, and would only be done if the risks to the child's safety cannot otherwise be addressed.

Q: If I pass the criminal record check but another adult in my home fails, can I continue to look after the child/children if that person leaves my home?

A: Yes. If an adult in your home does not pass the criminal record check and is determined to represent a threat to the child's safety, the safety plan for the child may include having that adult leave the home. As long as the risks to the child's safety can be addressed, there would be no reason to remove the child from the home or end benefits.