

***Child in the Home of a Relative* program**

Questions and Answers for MHSD Staff

Q1: What is changing with the *Child in the Home of a Relative* (CIHR) program?

A1: Applications for CIHR assistance will no longer be accepted after end of day March 31, 2010. CIHR is an income assistance program provided under the *Employment and Assistance Act*. Even though CIHR is administered by the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, the Ministry of Children and Family Development has responsibility for the program.

Q2: What happens to families who currently receive CIHR assistance?

A2: Families currently receiving CIHR assistance will continue to do so as long as they and the child or youth in their care continue to meet the criteria for assistance under the existing CIHR program administered by MHSD.

Q3: What happens to families who apply for CIHR before the deadline?

A3: Families who apply for CIHR on or before March 31, 2010, will have their applications assessed and processed according to the existing regulations and policies. If they meet the eligibility criteria, they will receive CIHR.

Q4: Why is the Ministry of Children and Family Development phasing out the CIHR program?

A4: The CIHR program was limited in its support beyond financial assistance to meet the child's needs.

When there is an assessed need for services and supports, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) has an obligation to ensure the safety and well-being of children who are temporarily unable to live with their parents. MCFD developed the **Extended Family Program (EFP)**, which begins April 1, 2010, as an expansion of its out-of-care options. Key components of EFP include: individual assessment and long-term planning; and increased supports available to children, parents and care providers to ensure continuity and stability for the child.

Q5: What happens to a family if they request CIHR after the deadline or no longer meet CIHR eligibility criteria?

A5: After March 31, 2010, if a family no longer meets the criteria for CIHR, or if a child moves to a new care provider, the family's eligibility for CIHR assistance will end and they will **not** be able to re-apply.

After March 31, 2010, no new applications will be accepted for CIHR. Families who need financial assistance may be eligible for the Child Tax Benefit, the B.C. Family Bonus, the Universal Child Care Benefit, and the Child Disability Benefit (if the child has a disability). There are also a number of community-based services for families who need non-financial supports.

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MCFD's Extended Family Program can provide financial and supplemental benefits to care providers if an assessment determines that the child's needs are best served by an out-of-home placement with extended family members or others who have a significant relationship with the child.

Alternatively, care providers may apply for income assistance with the child as a dependent if they meet eligibility criteria (see Q9, Q10 and Q11).

Q6: What if someone is receiving CIHR benefits but they want to explore the possibility of being accepted to the new program – will this jeopardize their eligibility for CIHR?

A6: No. The care provider will continue to receive CIHR assistance until it is determined through an assessment whether or not the Extended Family Program is the best option for the family's unique circumstances. If they do not meet the criteria for EFP, they may continue receiving their CIHR assistance. On the other hand, if the Extended Family Program is considered the best option for the family – after the parent, child and care providers are assessed – an agreement would be signed, MCFD will advise MHSD of the agreement, CIHR income assistance would cease and the care provider would receive benefits under the new program.

Q7: How does the Extended Family Program work?

A7: MCFD's **Extended Family Program** is being offered under Section 8 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*. Section 8 agreements allow MCFD to offer financial and other services to extended family members or other significant persons in a child's life to support an out-of-home living arrangement, if the parents are temporarily unable to care for the child.

Q8: How does the Extended Family Program differ from the CIHR program?

A8: There are some key difference between CIHR and the Extended Family Program:

- The Extended Family Program is not an eligibility-based program. Both the child's and the parents' needs are assessed. The parents and ministry or delegated Aboriginal agency staff work together to see if other options or supports can help the child to remain at home;
- Parents who temporarily cannot care for a child in their home are the ones who request help from the Extended Family Program – not the care provider;
- The Extended Family Program focuses on helping parents resolve their temporary situation in order to have their child return to their care;
- With the Extended Family Program, a written service plan is developed for the child, family and care provider that details the services and supports necessary to meet their needs;
- Parents continue their guardianship responsibilities, while the care provider provides day-to-day care and custody for the child;
- The Extended Family Program can be offered to a care provider who has a significant or cultural attachment to a child, regardless of whether they are related;

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- Care providers are screened and assessed to determine suitability;
- Agreements are reviewed every 6 months.

Note: If a person has legal custody and/or guardianship of a child, they do **not** meet the criteria for “care provider” under the Extended Family Program.

Q9: Can families who don't meet eligibility criteria for the Extended Family Program apply for income assistance through MHSD with the child as a dependent?

A9: Yes, the care provider may apply for income assistance. The child must meet the ministry's definition of a “dependent child,” while the care provider must meet the definition of a “parent” and other eligibility criteria.

Q10: What is the definition of a “dependent child”?

A10: A “dependent child” includes:

- A child under 19 (other than a child who is 18 years of age and is a person with disabilities);
- Who resides in the parent's place of residence for more than 50 per cent of each month; and
- Relies on that parent for the necessities of life.

Q11: What is the definition of a “parent”?

A11: A “parent,” for the purposes of a dependent child, is defined as either the:

- biological mother or father;
- adoptive mother or father;
- individuals with legal custody; or
- individuals with legal guardianship.

Q12: How are Extended Family Program payments treated if the care provider is also in receipt of income assistance?

A12: Because Extended Family Program payments are provided under section 8 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, they are **exempt as income** [see Schedule B, Section 1 (xxi) of the Employment and Assistance Regulation].

Note: In cases where income assistance clients receive Extended Family Program payments for a child, the child is **not** considered a dependent when calculating income assistance entitlement.

For more information on the Extended Family Program and other MCFD programs, please see MCFD's website (www.gov.bc.ca/mcf/alternativestofostercare/index.htm) where public FAQs are also available.