

## COVID-19 AND EXTENDED SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH IN CARE

### Frequently asked questions

#### Ministry of Children and Family Development

Updated: March 31, 2020

- For non-medical-related questions about COVID-19, call 1-888-COVID19 (1-888-268-4319). Service is available from 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. seven days a week.
  - Call 811 or your primary care provider if you are concerned you may have been exposed to or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.
  - For general health-related questions, call 1-833-784-4397. Service is available from 7:00 a.m. to midnight EST.
  - For general information on COVID-19, see the BC Centre for Disease Control online resources at <http://covid-19.bccdc.ca/>.
  - If you think you may have symptoms, the BC Centre for Disease Control's self-assessment tool can help you determine if you need further assessment of testing for COVID-19: <http://covid19.thrive.health>
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#### **Q1. What measures have you introduced and what will they mean for youth in care?**

- Youth and young adults from care will continue receiving the same level of service throughout the pandemic, even if they were set to age out. That means caregivers will be supported to allow youth to stay in their foster home, contracted residential agency or with extended family under the Extended Family program past the age of 19 and throughout the pandemic.
- Youth supported under Independent Living Agreements or Youth Agreements and turning 19 will have their agreements extended, allowing them to continue to receive monthly support during the pandemic.
- Young adults who are enrolled in the Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) program will continue to receive financial support despite school closures and other training program interruptions caused by the current pandemic.
- These emergency measures will help young people safely stay where they are.

#### **Q2. Will foster caregivers and other caregivers (such as contracted residential agencies) get additional monthly funding?**

- Caregivers will continue to receive the same level of monthly support, but support will now be extended to allow arrangements to continue past a youth's 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Social workers are reaching out to caregivers to modify agreements where extensions are needed during the pandemic period.

**Q3. How long will these measures be in place?**

- These are interim, emergency steps we're taking to ensure youth don't fall through the cracks during this pandemic.
- The ministry will take its guidance from the Public Health Officer and align with broader government approaches to determine the term of emergency pandemic measures.

**Q4. What about young adults on AYA whose programs have been impacted due to COVID-19?**

- All young adults who are currently on an AYA will continue to receive funding during the pandemic period and may be eligible for an extension of AYA support beyond the current maximum of 48 months to account for program interruptions caused by COVID-19.

**Q5. Why not use AYA as a mechanism to support every young adult who is aging out of care?**

- The Agreements with Young Adults program is a legislated program with specific eligibility requirements. It is intended to support those young adults who are pursuing educational, training, therapeutic or life skills programs.
- Though we continue to work with partners to explore further improvements to the program and eligibility over the long term, we recognized that some immediate steps were needed to help young people during the pandemic.
- We are working to ensure that all young adults who are currently on an AYA continue to receive funding during the pandemic period.
- For young adults who have aged out and are not participating in an AYA, additional efforts will be made to locate and connect them to programming options and other lines of available support, like the B.C. Emergency Benefit for Workers and the Federal Emergency Care Benefit.

**Q6. Have you reached out to all youth in care since the pandemic started? What have you told them? What have you been doing to support them up to now?**

- We have communicated with youth through their social workers, sending a letter to all young adults participating in the AYA program in each Service Delivery Area or Delegated Aboriginal Agency. Updates were also sent to youth-serving organizations.
- The letters acknowledge the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak and physical distancing measures which may be impacting their employment and participation in programs and causing concern about their support from the Ministry.
- They also provide links to credible and accurate information about COVID-19 and include the Public Health Officer's advice on how to stay healthy and prevent the spread of infections.
- With these new emergency measures now in place, we will be following up to help youth access supports and get help fast.
- We are also meeting with Fostering Change on a weekly basis.

**Q7. What other option does a youth have if they do not want to remain in their current placement?**

- Young adults can opt to apply for income assistance with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (SDPR). MCFD will work with SDPR to expedite their application and streamline approvals.

**Q8. What about youth who are scheduled to transition to CLBC during this pandemic?**

- Youth in care who are scheduled to transition to CLBC during this pandemic will be supported on an individual case-by-case basis. CLBC will work closely with MCFD and DAAs to support a smooth transition for these youth.

**Q9. What about those youth who are turning 19, during the pandemic, on a youth agreement or independent living agreement?**

- Youth nearing the end of a youth agreement or an independent living agreement, will be given an option to continue receiving funding for the duration of the pandemic.
- Social workers will contact youth to walk them through this process.

**Q10. There are youth who applied several weeks ago for the AYA program (and are eligible) and have not received approval for participation. Will the ministry address these delays in approvals?**

- We don't want people falling through cracks.
- Ministry staff are in the process of developing practice directives, which help provide guidance to social workers working directly with youth about how we can implement the range of youth emergency measures.
- We will include special attention to identifying opportunities to expedite approvals and ensure youth are not left waiting for long periods of time to get into the program.

**Q11. How will the most vulnerable youth be reached?**

- This is something we need help to achieve through leveraging social media and umbrella organizations like First Call or the Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks to reach out to youth and get them connected to supports.
- We encourage anyone with contact with youth in or from care to refer to our [Youth and Young Adults page](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/covid-19-information/youth-young-adults-response-to-covid-19) (https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/covid-19-information/youth-young-adults-response-to-covid-19) or AgedOut.com for additional information.

**Q12. Will there be additional discretionary funds released to former youth in care (in addition to AYA or Independent Living financial assistance)?**

- The ministry has always provided discretionary funds to youth on a case-by-case basis – where the needs of the youth and the clinical judgment of the social worker determine the level of support.
- We want youth and social workers to maintain this level flexibility and we will continue to operate using the same case-by case approach.

**Q13. What about youth who can't attend school or programming in spring but would like to enroll in September and are not on a AYA contract currently. Will they still be eligible for AYA support?**

- They could be. We need to look at these scenarios on a case-by-case basis.
- Young adults in this position should contact their local MCFD/DAA office or former social worker to discuss these options.

**Q14. Youth historically experienced barriers in applying to AYA program including being turned away at an administrative level (inadequate documentation as 'proof' of enrolment). How will you ensure this doesn't happen?**

- Emergency measures to support youth are intended to be accessible.
- We want to streamline access to support.
- Practice directives – which provide guidance to social workers – are currently under development to support implementation of these emergency measures.
- We will ensure to incorporate consideration for how the AYA program can be administratively streamlined to support youth during this time.

**Q15. You have mentioned there will be a point person to assist youth in navigating these supports. Who is this person?**

- There is not a single point person. The ministry has taken this approach:
  - If you feel that any of these emergency measures could apply to you or someone you know, please contact your local MCFD office or Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA) for more information.
  - You can do this by reaching out to your [local MCFD/DAA office](#) regarding these additional services (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/data-monitoring-quality-assurance/find-services-for-children-teens-families>)
  - You can also contact the Representative for Children and Youth at [rcy@rcybc.ca](mailto:rcy@rcybc.ca) or call 1-800-476-3933. The Representative's Office can support you in making the right connections within your local MCFD or DAA office

**Q16. How are social workers being supported?**

- Social workers throughout MCFD and DAAs will be receiving practice guidance to ensure they are well equipped to support the range of youth who require these emergency measures during the pandemic.
- Social workers will be in contact with caregivers, youth, and others over coming days to begin the process of ensuring everything is in place for ongoing support.
- If at any time, you have further questions, please contact your local MCFD office or Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA) for more information.
- You can also contact the Representative for Children and Youth at [rcy@rcybc.ca](mailto:rcy@rcybc.ca) or call 1-800-476-3933. The Representatives Office can support you in making the right connections within your local MCFD or DAA office