

CHILDREN'S FORUM

Terms of Reference

Purpose/Mandate:

The Children's Forum brings together the Ministry of Children and Family Development (the Ministry) and organizations that have a legislated public accountability and independent reporting role to provide information and advice to the Ministry. Through collaboration, the Children's Forum aims to increase public value and achieve positive change in the system of services to vulnerable children and youth by ensuring that issues and developments are brought to the forefront and reviewed and discussed as they emerge. In undertaking its work, the Children's Forum will have special regard to the unique needs and circumstances of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and youth.

The overall goal is to improve outcomes for children and youth served by the Ministry under one of its six service lines of: Early Years Services (early childhood development and child care), Child and Youth with Special Needs, Child and Youth Mental Health Services, Child Safety, Family Support and Children in Care Services, Adoption Services, and Youth Justices Services.

The Children's Forum will meet regularly to:

- share information, share experiences and identify how each agencies' work can complement others, and discuss and provide advice about issues and services affecting vulnerable children and youth and the child serving system;
- identify, review and discuss issues of common concern and emerging trends and developments;
- collaborate in support of common issues or matters with the goal of improving outcomes related to the overall health, safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and youth; and,
- be available to Ministries for conversation/discussion on emerging legislative and public policy matters that are of importance to children, youth, and families.

Membership:

The membership of the Children's Forum is:

- Ministry of Children and Family Development (Chair) – Deputy Minister and Provincial Director of Child Welfare
- Chief Coroner, British Columbia Coroners Service
- Ombudsperson, Office of the Ombudsperson
- Public Guardian and Trustee, Public Guardian and Trustee of British Columbia
- Provincial Health Officer, Office of the Provincial Health Officer
- Representative for Children and Youth, Office of the Representative for Children and Youth
- Commissioner, Human Rights Commissioner

New membership requests must be submitted in writing and reviewed/approved by the Children's Forum membership.

Accountability:

The members of the Children’s Forum are collectively accountable for fostering collaboration in the interests of meeting the purpose and carrying out the mandate of the Children’s Forum.

Authority:

Decisions of the Children’s Forum are made by consensus, without compromising the individual mandates of members. Individual members of the Children’s Forum have no authority to approve actions or speak on behalf of the Children’s Forum unless given such authority by the Forum.

Roles and Responsibilities:

Members commit to:

- Attending all scheduled meetings of the Forum
- Preparing for and constructively participating in meetings of the Forum
- Being an ambassador for the Forum and wholeheartedly supporting and championing the work of the Forum
- Sharing general and systemic information openly and honestly with other members
- Listening to the views of others, advocating their own, identifying common interests and being open to alternatives
- As soon as practical, bringing issues to the attention of the members that they deem may affect the mandate and responsibilities of Forum
- Maintaining the confidentiality of internal discussions of the Forum.

Members can expect:

- To be provided with complete, accurate and meaningful information in a timely way
- To be alerted to potential issues or matters impacting the work of Forum
- To have issues raised and discussed in a positive manner
- Open and honest discussion.

Organization and Operations:

Meetings

- Meetings of the Forum will be held three times each year in the Fall, Winter and Spring. A meeting schedule for each year will be set by the members as a group.
- Meetings of the Forum are expected to be four (4) hours in duration.
- Additional meetings of the Forum may be called if required.
- Meetings of the Forum will be chaired by the Deputy Minister, MCFD. If the Deputy Minister is unable to chair all or part of a meeting the Provincial Director will act as Chair or another member will be designated to chair all or a portion of the meeting.

- If required, sub-groups of the Forum may be formed and sub-group meetings held at date(s) and time(s) convenient to the sup-group members.

Attendance at Meetings

- Members are expected to attend regularly schedule meetings of the Forum; if a member is unable to attend due to urgent or unforeseen circumstances, the member may send a delegate; the delegate should have authority to represent the views of the member’s public body.
- If a member does not attend two consecutive meetings, the Chair will contact the member to inquire about his or her attendance and ability to participate in the Forum.
- Members may at their discretion bring a staff person from their office to meetings of the Forum.
- Other officials of public bodies and representatives of other organizations may be invited to attend and speak to specific issues or matters at Forum meetings.

Agendas and Record of Meetings

- Meeting agendas will be developed by the Chair in consultation with members.
- Agendas and materials for each Forum meeting will be distributed in advance of meeting(s) with sufficient time to allow for preparation by the members.
- A high-level summary record of discussions at Forum meetings will be kept.

Public Reporting

- Information on the Children’s Forum will be made publicly available through the Ministry’s website.
- On an annual basis, the Forum will prepare and make publicly available a summary of its activities.

Review:

- The members will undertake ongoing “check-ins” to verify the overall state or “health” of the Forum’s operations and the status of processes.
- The members will undertake a regular yearly review of “Terms of Reference”, and based on this review and mutual decision of all the members, the “Terms of Reference” may be amended, varied or modified.