

WHAT WE HEARD

About Youth Transitions and the Family Based
Caregiver Payment Model in British Columbia

Phase One Engagement Report

The Ministry of Children and Family Development | February 2019

Acknowledgement

This report was produced on the territory of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) sincerely thanks everyone who has taken time to share their thoughts, experiences and advice to support future systemic changes to the child welfare system. By working together, positive and impactful changes will be made for children, youth and families.

Executive Summary

All children and youth deserve to live with caregivers that provide love, safety and security; meet their physical and emotional needs; nurture a sense of belonging; foster cultural connections; and support them to fulfill their unique potential. Indigenous peoples, including First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples have their own distinct rights as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. While the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) has seen some systemic improvements in critical areas, such as a reduction in the number of children and youth in care and an increase in the use of out of care options, referring to placements where children can stay with their family and community while receiving ministry support, much more can be done. Meaningful change can only be done in collaboration with partners and Indigenous communities.

This document reflects countless hours of engagement with many community partners. The ministry values the time and passion participants brought to these sessions. What was heard allows government to have a better understanding of what's important to key groups—what's working and what isn't—and the changes they want in the future. We learned so much from listening and hope our partners found these sessions both informative and supportive. One thing that stood out is that many of government's programs are not clearly understood. Finding improved ways to communicate about them and spread understanding in a consistent manner is important. This document is called "What We Heard" because it's a reflection of just that. It is not intended as an accurate picture of policy and practice or the breadth of programs. Many programs, like housing for youth and agreements with young adults (AYA) are new or have been enhanced over the past year and a half. The goal of this report is singular in its capturing of some community partners' views and insights so that they, in turn, inform government's future improvements to the system of care.

Two areas of critical importance to making systemic changes are how MCFD supports caregivers, particularly foster and extended family members, and the programs and supports MCFD offers to youth after they turn 19 and transition out of ministry care.

Building off the direction set out in the Minister's Mandate Letter, and the advice received from a number of reports and recommendations relating to these two areas, MCFD initiated comprehensive reviews of the family based caregiver payment model (FBCPM) and supports for youth transitions into adulthood. The intention was to ensure a holistic approach to engagement and hear the voices of those that experience the child welfare system with those that support them. The information collected in engagement will be used to inform options for future changes to the FBCPM and youth transition supports.

To better understand the current state and the opportunities for change in the FBCPM and youth transitions, the ministry launched an extensive provincial-wide engagement process. The engagement approach was designed in two phases.

- In phase one, MCFD sought advice and expertise from partner Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAA) and a number of community organizations that provide services to caregivers and youth (Appendix A). This first phase ran from the spring to the fall of 2018 and included engagement sessions with a total of 21 DAAs and 15 community sessions which included caregivers, community agency staff and former youth in care.
- The second phase of engagement is currently underway; it began in the fall of 2018, and will conclude at the end of this fiscal year 2018/19. MCFD is conducting follow-up focus groups and surveys with foster caregivers and youth/young adults who are or have been in contact with the ministry. The second phase also includes engaging with Indigenous caregivers who are extended family members. All of these groups were identified for focus groups through preliminary research and were confirmed through the first phase of engagement as key populations in informing these priority projects.

MCFD has received a substantial amount of knowledge, ideas and opportunities from the phase one engagement process. The list below identifies some of the key themes from phase one. Once phase two is complete, key themes from those engagements will be summarized and reported.

Key themes on the Family Based Caregiver Payment Model

- *Many caregivers are working together to support each other.*
- *Formal and informal Indigenous cultural learning experiences and opportunities for caregivers have been well received.*
- *Many caregivers and extended family members caring for children and youth (in both in and out of care placements) are experiencing financial pressures.*
- *Rising housing costs and cost of living have caused some caregivers to use their own money to meet the needs of the children and youth in their care.*
- *The move to a permanency option - meaning, adoption or a return to the care of family or extended family - for children and youth may result in a loss of supports.*
- *Many caregivers are not able to maintain employment while caring for children with complex needs.*
- *Many caregivers said that the process to access funding makes them feel that they have to advocate for additional funding for a child or youth in their care.*
- *The majority of caregivers indicated that there are not enough resources available to support cultural connections for youth aging out of care.*

Key themes on youth transitions including the Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) program

- *The AYA is a good program for young adults, with the potential to be even better with improvements.*
- *Eligible young adults on AYA appreciate that the program is available to them.*
- *Many caregivers and youth said early transition planning for youth does not typically happen or fully meet the needs of the youth.*
- *Youth and young adults are often disconnected from community and culture.*

- *Youth and young adults on AYA want more support and to continue relationships in a meaningful network.*
- *AYA eligibility/access is too restrictive and complex and is not available to all youth and young adults aging out of care.*
- *The funding amount young adults receive on AYA doesn't cover all living expenses, such as housing.*
- *The life skill program options for AYA are narrow and not available across the province.*

Throughout the engagement, MCFD heard many innovative and wise practices implemented by DAA, caregivers and community agencies to support children, youth and families. Some of these practices include: supporting children, youth and caregiving families in maintaining cultural connections and practices including a cultural navigator program; developing a transportation network for caregivers to support each other with transportation needs; creating youth navigator positions dedicated to support youth transitioning; and providing transitional housing programs for youth after the age of 19, among others.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
Engagement Overview	2
<i>The Engagement Approach</i>	2
<i>The Engagement Participants</i>	2
<i>The Engagement Process</i>	3
What We Heard	6
<i>Youth Transitions, including AYA</i>	6
<i>The Family Based Caregiver Payment Model</i>	11
Conclusion	15
Appendix A	16

Introduction

There is a changing child welfare landscape in British Columbia. The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is committed to its vision that all children and youth live in safe, healthy and nurturing families, and are strongly connected to their communities and culture. In order to achieve this vision, the ministry acknowledges that there are many changes required within the current system of care.

Over the years, MCFD has received multiple reports with recommendations and feedback as to how it can improve or transform the system of care. This includes *the TRC Calls to Action; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); Delegated Aboriginal Agency 21 Issues Document; Grand Chief Ed John's Report on Indigenous Child Welfare in BC; Promising Practices Conference; the Residential Review/Aboriginal Companion Report; BC Coroners Report, the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) Reports* and others.

MCFD's Strategic Priorities Division has been involved in reviewing two specific components within the system of care:

The Family Based Caregiver Payment Model (FBCPM) - the payment model used for funding family caregivers in family-based settings (i.e. Foster parents, extended family members and parents who have adopted). This does not include funding provided to contracted residential agencies or supports to keep families safely together.

Youth transition supports – the programs and supports MCFD offers to youth after they turn 19 and transition out of ministry care (i.e. Agreements with Young Adults program).

These specific focus areas have been identified for review because supporting caregivers and youth transitioning out of care are essential to ensuring that children and youth receive the quality care and supports they need to achieve healthy development and a positive transition into adulthood.

To understand the current state and identify options for change within these two focus areas, it was essential that MCFD hear from those who have lived experience in the child welfare system or support those that do. As such, the ministry embarked on an extensive provincial-wide engagement process with the first phase capturing the knowledge and voices of Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAA), community agencies, caregivers, and youth and young adults in and from care.

The following section details and summarizes key themes from phase one of engagements on the topics of the FBCPM and youth transitions. The second phase of engagement is currently underway, and includes MCFD staff, caregivers – with a focus on Indigenous extended family member caregivers – and youth in and from care. A subsequent summary report of the process and results will be available on the BC Government webpage upon completion.

Engagement Overview

The Engagement Approach

The engagement approach was based on relationship building and open and transparent communication. MCFD sought advice from Indigenous leaders and practice experts on the engagement approach and looked to the *Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework*, *TRC Calls to Action* and the *UNDRIP* for guidance. The approach was also based on: bringing together multiple voices and perspectives; upholding the spirit of sharing, respect and learning; and honoring the importance of cultural safety and protocol.

Guidance and advice was also sought from MCFD's advisory members and staff, including the Strategic Initiatives Aboriginal Advisory Committee; Provincial Director of Child Welfare's Youth Advisory Council; Aboriginal Services Branch as well as cross ministry working groups comprised of staff with expertise in the two program areas.

The Engagement Participants

The engagement process included representation from a variety of key partners who are directly or indirectly involved with or impacted by the FBCPM and/or youth transitions. These include:

Phase One

Delegated Aboriginal Agencies – DAA staff offer valuable knowledge and experience of the current challenges and opportunities for each of the two focus areas, particularly for Indigenous children, youth and families.

Community agencies – There are numerous community agencies that offer supports and services to children, youth and families who are involved with MCFD. Community agency staff offer important knowledge and insights into how the two focus areas might be improved to better support caregivers and youth.

Caregivers – Foster parents and out of care caregivers, including extended family members of children and youth in care, are greatly impacted by the FBCPM and have advice and experience regarding how to support youth and young adults transitioning to adulthood. Caregivers offer substantial knowledge as to the current state of the payment model, and insights as to how this model could be changed to better support caregivers and the children and youth that they care for.

Youth and Young Adults – Youth in and from care are the experts on the supports and services they need to transition out of care and into early adulthood. As such, it was important that MCFD engage youth on their experiences and gather feedback to understand how programming could be redesigned to better support their needs.

Phase Two

MCFD Staff – MCFD staff offer knowledge and experience of the current challenges and opportunities for each of the two focus areas. In person sessions will be hosted across the province to ensure their voices are heard.

Caregivers – The second phase of engagement includes further dialogue with caregivers, particularly out of care Indigenous caregivers and foster caregivers.

Youth and Young Adults – This second phase of engagement includes further focus groups and outreach to youth and young adults.

The Engagement Process

The methodology for the engagement strategy was designed to ensure that there were multiple opportunities and methods for partners across the province to provide their feedback and knowledge on the FBCPM and youth transition supports. These opportunities included: hosting engagement sessions; sharing information at community and partner forums and workshops; and receiving ideas and submissions to a dedicated email address.

The engagement was organized over two phases. Phase one began in the spring of 2018 and included sessions with 21 DAA and 15 community partners throughout the province. In total, approximately 338 individuals participated in phase one (Figure 1.). Phase two is currently underway with MCFD staff, youth in and from care and caregivers, particularly Indigenous extended family caregivers.

The engagement sessions in phase one typically lasted two days in each location and were designed to allow for open discussion around the barriers, challenges, opportunities and desired changes participants would like to see within each of the two focus areas. The participant's responses were captured through various measures depending on the setting, including: a recording device (with permission) and a session scribe. A transcription of the recording was provided back to each participant group if the engagement was recorded. Examples of questions used in engagement sessions include:

Family Based Caregiver Payment Model

- What is the purpose of the foster family care rate (i.e. maintenance rate)? What changes would you make, if any, to the current maintenance rate cost categories?
- What are the challenges experienced by kinship families and alternative caregivers?
- What are your thoughts around the current caregiver types and what else is needed?
- What are the barriers in attracting other caregivers to look after children and youth?

Agreements with Young Adults

- How do youth and young adults find out about AYA?
- Do you feel culture is represented in the AYA program? Should it be?
- What should the purpose of AYA be?
- What does success on AYA look like?
- Why aren't more young adults accessing AYA?

Figure 1. Phase 1 Engagement Summary



*Total participant count represented does not align, as some participants were playing dual roles. Total participants are an approximation as the attendance to some sessions was calculated based on the memory of the facilitators. Staff counts include DAA participants.

What We've Heard

Youth Transitions, Including the AYA Program

The focus of the engagement questions included how to improve youth transitions out of care broadly. A key topic of conversation was the AYA program, as it is the only program that the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* enables the ministry to provide supports for young adults who have aged out of care.

Throughout the engagement sessions, MCFD gained invaluable insights regarding the great work and innovative practice currently taking place to support youth transitions across the province. The following sections highlight the main themes of what was heard throughout engagement.

Innovative practice in communities

DAAs provided many examples of innovation regarding how they work to strengthen the understanding and experience of culture, language and traditions for youth and young adults in their communities. Some examples include culture camps that include:

- Drumming, berry picking and basket weaving; connecting with Elders and family wellness programs; yearly honoring ceremonies for youth turning 19 and other life events; and finding ways to continue relationships with youth and young adults after they have aged out of care, even when financial assistance and supports end.

Additionally, some DAAs have hired youth navigators, a position entirely devoted to supporting youth and young adults during this time in their lives.

Community organizations spoke about how workers support youth to develop life-skills in a multitude of ways, including teaching them how to do their laundry, budgeting and grocery shopping. One organization even spoke of its transitional housing program that provides young adults from care with affordable and safe housing options post 19.

Caregivers noted the extra support they give to youth when it comes to accessing programs and services available to support them in their transition into adulthood (such as AYA); as well as, helping them acquire the skills and resources to live independently.

Lack of early transition planning

Early transition planning for youth leaving care does not always happen. There are many other priorities in a young person's life that end up taking precedence over transition planning. Aging out of care can be an anxious and stressful time for youth, which many youth would rather avoid than discuss with their caregiver or social worker. The young person may not feel comfortable or have a supportive and caring

adult to discuss their future goals with. Alternatively, a young person may not be in a place to begin transition planning, particularly if they are dealing with mental health or addictions.

Many caregivers indicated that they are not clear with respect to their role in transition planning or supporting the youth to obtain key life skills. Many participants felt that there is a lack of communication and dedicated resources to support transition planning (i.e. dedicated youth transition workers). As a result, many youth are leaving care without the necessary relational supports, life-skills or developmental milestones to live independently.

Lack of holistic programming

In many places across the province there is a lack of affordable housing that meets the needs of young adults. Participants said that in many cases, this leads to homelessness and that some young adults are exposed to further trauma and other challenges as they struggle to find housing.

There is also a lack of flexibility in the current system for young adults who wish to remain living with their caregiver beyond 19. Many young adults are not ready to leave their caregiver at 19 or necessarily want to. The majority of participants believe there should be more options and flexibility within the system to support young adults to stay in safe, stable living conditions, providing the caregiver is willing and being supported to do so.

The current system also does not take into account that young adults have different levels of capacity and needs, with some young adults having more complex needs than others. Participants asked for more support for youth and young adults with disabilities and other physical and mental health needs who are not ready for independence at 19.

A number of participants indicated that current youth programs do not meet the needs of all youth and young adults transitioning into adulthood from MCFD services. While current programs, such as AYA appeal to and are accessed by a small percentage of youth and young adults aging out of care, there is a call for more programs and supports that meet the diverse interests, situations and needs of all youth, not just a few.

Lack of community and cultural connections while in care

Many young adults feel disconnected from their culture and community when they come into care, leaving them isolated and without a natural network of supports after they turn 19. Participants stated that the current care system does not build interdependence or promote enough opportunities for the youth to re-establish connections with their community or cultural roots in a meaningful way. Furthermore, some young adults said that they feel judged or unsupported to connect with their cultures.

Participants shared that some Indigenous communities do not have the capacity or resources to support young adults or their transition needs; as such, some expressed concern about young adults returning to their community, as they may have limited guidance and support.

Transactional nature of the AYA program

Many participants feel that the current AYA program is a step in the right direction, but that it does not provide enough supports to help young adults succeed. In its current transactional approach, young adults do not receive any relationally-based supports through the program. For example, participants noted that if a young adult is struggling while receiving an AYA, there is little support available to help them stay on track. Many participants believe that AYA should be administered through a case management model to ensure that a worker is available if a young person requires extra support or is going through a difficult time.

It was also shared that the AYA program is limited in the types of support it provides to young adults, and does not adapt to the young person's changing needs. The current AYA funding does not cover wrap-around supports for young adults, such as trauma support, counselling, mentoring, or cultural activities; nor does it take into account other lifestyle requirements, such as if a young person has dependents. Additionally, participants noted that the program is too rigid, in that it does not accommodate or adapt to changes in a young person's life circumstances where they may need to take time off school but still require financial support (i.e. a personal or family emergency, the death of a loved one).

Many participants also spoke to the need for transition supports leading up to completion of the AYA program; for example, support to find employment upon completion of educational programs. It was suggested that the AYA program allow a "buffer" period of funding to support young adults as they seek employment.

Restrictive eligibility criteria of the AYA program

Another theme that emerged regarding the AYA program was that the eligibility criteria is too narrow and restrictive. The current eligibility requirements exclude certain care statuses (current eligibility is limited to continuing custody order or those on a youth agreement the day before their 19th birthday). Participants felt that in some instances, this has impacted permanency decisions made by youth, caregivers and social workers, as care statuses may be chosen based on future AYA eligibility.

The process for accessing AYA is too complex and onerous. The current application process for the AYA program is a challenge for young adults, as the application form itself requires a lot of information and many young adults do not have the necessary information or technology to complete the application process. Many young adults must then seek out someone to support them with the application, which can be difficult for them to find, and if they do find someone, they must then re-tell their care history to someone new. For many youth, especially those who have previous relationships with a DAA, attending or returning to an MCFD office for support is not something they want to do.

Participants also highlighted the lack of support to assist young adults in applying for AYA. For example, many young adults do not know which MCFD offices to go to for help, and in some cases, feel that social workers do not fully understand the AYA program.

Insufficient AYA Funding Amounts

Across the province, many participants indicated that the funding amount provided to a young adult on an AYA is not sufficient to meet their holistic needs. Currently, a young adult on AYA may receive up to a maximum of \$1,250/month; however, many young adults do not receive the full amount as the amount provided is based on a needs assessment.

Participants also noted that the current funding amount does not take into account the geographical differences in the cost of living. While many young adults struggle to make ends meet with the current AYA funding amount, this is particularly true for those dwelling in high cost of living areas. For this reason, many young adults struggle to obtain and afford safe housing options while on AYA.

Many young adults also noted feeling discouraged and deterred to be employed while on an AYA, as their AYA funding is 'clawed back' when their employment income reaches a certain amount. It was noted that some participants had different experiences with this practice, depending on how the social worker interprets the AYA policy. Participants would like to see the AYA program encourage young adults to work while on AYA, without it impacting their AYA monthly funding amount.

A number of participants also expressed frustration about some discrepancies and inconsistencies in the support and funding that they may receive from AYA from their peers or if they move to a different location in the province.

Punitive nature of the AYA program

Another common theme that emerged was that many young adults are not ready to attend post-secondary or vocational training immediately after turning 19. Instead, many may choose to attend a life skills program instead. Participants said that they end up using a portion of their AYA on a life skills program as they try to find stability and decide what they want to do with their lives. Youth are concerned that by the time they are ready to attend an educational program, they may have used up a significant amount of their AYA and need to find other sources of financial support. As such, many participants have reported that the 48-month duration of the AYA program is not a sufficient amount of time for a young adult to achieve their educational and career aspirations.

Participants commented that the current AYA program is punitive and penalizes mistakes, such as performing poorly in school. They also said that young adults are expected to complete full time course loads within 48 months, when their non-care peers take much longer. Consequently, this places a lot of pressure and stress on the young person, as they have their financial support taken away if they make mistakes or are not able to uphold the program's expectations. A few young adults said they felt like they were being discouraged from re-evaluating or changing their educational/career options once they had started an AYA.

Many participants said that AYA funding does not fund non-conventional career pursuits, such as music or weaving. Young adults said that this limits their educational/career options, which may not reflect interests and passions.

Lack of life-skills programming across the province

Currently, the AYA program provides a list of approved life skills programs that a young person may take to receive AYA. Participants indicated that these life skills programs are often very narrow in scope, are not accessible in many regions, and do not include important aspects such as culture. Programs need to take into account informal learning, skills and interests that often take place outside of a typical program setting, such as between an elder and a young person – this is outside of the scope of current programming.

Family Based Caregiver Payment Model

The family based caregiver payment model (FBCPM) identifies the financial assistance that is provided to family-based caregivers. In-care caregivers include foster and restricted caregivers, and out of care caregivers include those in an extended family program, interim or temporary custody order, post transfer of custody assistance, and post adoption assistance. The financial assistance available depends on a number of factors, which are complex, difficult to navigate and limited.

When asked about the payment model, some participants spoke about inconsistencies in how financial assistance was provided and attributed it to different practices and policy interpretations between offices. Some also said they saw inconsistencies in financial assistance provided to caregivers between MCFD offices and DAAs. Many participants spoke of the need for the system to have more structure and consistency, but to be balanced with the flexibility for staff and caregivers to meet the unique needs of the children and youth in their care.

Despite the challenges on the payment model there were many stories of the innovative ways DAAs and community partners were meeting the needs of children and youth. Participants felt the payment model needed to be revised so that workarounds were no longer necessary to meet the needs of children and youth.

Innovative Practice

Participants provided examples of innovative practice that spoke to the payment model and how participants worked to support families to safely stay together. Below is a small sample:

- Aunties moving into the family home (through an agreement) while parents were away; finding ways to support parents to develop the skills so children and youth can return to their care.
- Developing a transportation support network for caregivers.
- Establishing regular respite homes, including some cases where the respite providers come into the caregiver's home.
- Creating caregiver mentorship programs and caregiving communities so foster families do things together like vacations and create a genuine sense of family and community amongst each other.
- Creating new team compositions, such as family connection/wellness teams, behavioural consultants that travel and youth navigator positions.

The financial implications of becoming a caregiver

Many foster caregivers indicated that they were not motivated by money to become a caregiver. However, they said the financial pressures associated with being a caregiver were influencing their retention and their willingness to recruit others to consider becoming foster caregivers. In tandem, other barriers that were noted:

- In every part of the province, participants highlighted the financial implications of being a caregiver. They noted that payment rates have not kept pace with the cost of living and have not increased since 2009.
- Housing was cited as a major barrier for people to become caregivers; including the high housing start-up costs when a child first comes into a caregiver's home.

Barriers for out-of-care caregivers included the reduced financial support through the family care rate (in some placement types), and lack of access to additional supports for the child and family. This resulted in family members not being able to care for their family members, potentially leading to a placement breakdown, and/or the child/youth moving to an in-care placement in order to receive the supports that they need. There was significant support for an increase in rates for out-of-care care providers; this was not limited to a cost of living increase but also for creating equity across in-care and out-of-care placements.

Participants expressed the hope that funding levels would be increased to ensure that payment rates do not act as a disincentive to caregiving and are sufficient to provide the care needed for children and youth in care through to adulthood. Many participants believe that the funding system should reflect the time commitment expected of a caregiver, particularly where the caregiving commitment means that maintaining employment would not be possible.

Participants also highlighted other aspects of the system that are linked to the caregiver payment model, such as challenges with training and the current assessment process, including concerns around cultural safety and inconsistent application of the levels assessment.

New placements and the levelling model

When a child or youth first comes to a care provider, they often arrive with very little notice, few personal belongings and without their needs being fully assessed. This means they often don't have essentials such as a car seat, clothing, diapers, crib or stroller. Many participants said that there are usually delays in accessing the funding to set up a new placement and that this funding is sometimes not enough to meet the needs of the child or youth.

Some participants feel that the payment model and caregiver leveling model (the funding structure that assigns a payment bracket to a caregiver based on their skills as well as the complexity of need the child has) impacts placement decisions.

For example, children and youth may not be placed in an out-of-care placement due to limited supports and future program availability (e.g. eligibility criteria to the Agreements with Young Adults program). Participants also spoke about children and youth with high needs being placed in a home that is not the

best option to meet their needs because of a shortage of appropriately qualified placements. Many participants suggested that there needs to be a focus on reducing housing as a barrier to placements and financial supports need to achieve that.

Meeting the child's needs and rights

When participants were asked about their ability to meet the needs and rights of children and youth in care, limited and inflexible funding was commonly cited as a problem. As a result, many caregivers reported using their own money to provide for the children and youth in their care.

It was also noted that there is limited funding available to maintain or develop connections with the children's culture and natural networks of support. As well, many caregivers said they were unable to access the services required to address trauma and meet the complex needs of the children in their care. It was suggested that funding be available to maintain connection with culture and natural network of support; as well as, recognition of the cost and time of accessing services for children and youth in remote communities.

Caregivers spoke about their experience of trying to access additional funding to support young adults. They spoke of rules being inconsistently applied and allocated in a payment model that is complex to understand and navigate. Relief support was also described as challenging to access – from financial support, operational resources (the actual respite or relief worker) and policy limitations perspectives.

Many caregivers want to easily and efficiently access appropriate funding and support in order to meet the needs and rights of the children and youth in their care. They also want easy access to relief/respite support as well as services and supports to address trauma for themselves and those in their care.

Caregivers shared a deep desire to provide effective, reliable and timely supports to meet the needs of children and youth. Many shared best practices and strategies to ensure that needs are met for children and youth and that caregivers have the support they need. The priority was placed on maintaining familial connections and supporting families to care for children and youth.

Overall, there was support for a change to the payments to ensure there is funding to meet the needs and rights of children and youth and that there is equity in the financial support provided; however, few participants suggested changes to the level system.

Participants felt that the move to a permanency option for children and youth often resulted in a loss of supports, which could be a barrier for some prospective guardians and adoptive parents.

The experience of being a caregiver

Many participants said they cannot maintain employment while caring for a child or youth; caregivers may be expected to attend meetings during the day that are related to the child or youth in their care. Additionally, the financial stability of families may be compromised by the inability to access financial support between placements.

Participants suggested that the payment model reflect the cost of holding a place open for a child or youth in order to ensure well-matched placements can occur for children and youth as they come into care. Participants also spoke about the associated costs of caregiving that they had not anticipated, such as difficulties with insurance and the level of wear and tear on their home.

Some caregivers described the process of accessing funding as humiliating when they had to advocate for funding for the children and youth in their care. They voiced concern about being perceived to be a 'troublemaker', and their concerns that this could lead to the removal of a child from their care or a step down in their levelling. Yet, even when there are strained relationships, participants are always focused on meeting the needs of children and youth as a priority.

Participants indicated they want to be able to access responsive and preventative support and be able to access advice relating to financial decisions and balancing those with the needs of the child. They want to be valued as a key member of the team that is providing care and support to the child. Many felt that a collaborative relationship across the care team and including the caregiver can support meeting the needs of children and youth and can be a significant factor in increasing caregiver recruitment and retention.

When a placement is in crisis/breaks down

Participants reported that families can only access certain supports once they are experiencing crises, rather than receiving those supports as a proactive investment that could facilitate a new placement or prevent placement crisis or breakdown. Some caregivers reported that they were not supported to cope and to process their experience following a placement breakdown.

When a young person leaves government care at 19

Many participants said the funding and financial support for young adults to transition into adulthood does not meet their needs. The payment model does not have provisions for young adults older than 19 who are not ready to transition. Participants would like the payment model to align with youth transition supports. Participants requested more information on how to access AYA and wished there was more support to assist with youth transitions. Caregivers suggested an interim step or a bridging between the age of transition, stating that many of the young adults they have cared for over the years were not ready for a program like AYA at 19.

Many caregivers felt that it is important that youth and young adults are supported leading up to transitioning into adulthood. Caregivers also requested support and guidance as the young person leaves their care. They suggested that young adults should be able to remain or return to living with their caregiving family beyond the age of 19 and receive the financial support necessary to enable a positive and well-supported transition to adulthood.

Caregivers also spoke of policy restrictions that prevented young adults from staying in their home with a room and board agreement. They also talked about the concern of having to ask a young person to leave their home on their birthday and requested more time to transition a young adult out of their home.

Conclusion

Government appreciates the honest dialogue that allowed it to gather a wealth of knowledge and advice on the Family Based Caregiver Payment Model and youth transition supports during the first phase of consultations. The ministry is grateful for the welcome staff received and humbled by the kind words from so many of our partners. We heard that many participants felt that this process was guided by open, honest and real conversations about challenges in the system. We know this process can be difficult. It can be challenging for the ministry to hear that the policies and programs that staff have worked hard on are not meeting intended outcomes. It's important to us that details of new programs and how to access them, are communicated clearly and understood, especially by front-line ministry staff, so that benefits to caregivers, children and youth are maximized. Again, we appreciate partners' participation in these engagement sessions. Their willingness to share their passion, frustrations, experiences and advice about aspects of the system of care is commendable. As we continue the engagement process into Phase Two, know that together, we are making positive and impactful changes to better support caregivers, children, youth and families in B.C.

Appendix A. Phase One Participants

Delegated Aboriginal Agencies

- Ayas Men Men Child & Family Services (Squamish Nation) (Coast/North Shore)
- Carrier Sekani Family Services (North Central)
- Denisiqi Services Society (Thompson Cariboo)
- Fraser Valley Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (East Fraser)
- Gitxsan Child & Family Services Society (Northwest)
- Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Child & Family Services (Kootenays)
- Knucwentwecw Society (Thompson Cariboo)
- K'WAK'WALAT'SI ('Namgis) Child and Family Services (North Vancouver Island)
- Kwumut Lelum Child & Family Services (North Vancouver Island)
- Lalum'utul' Smun'eem Child & Family Services (South Vancouver Island)
- Métis Family Services (South Fraser)
- Nezul Be Hunuyeh Child & Family Services Society (North Central)
- NIL/TU,O Child & Family Services Society (South Vancouver Island)
- Nisga'a Child & Family Services (North West)
- Nlha'7kapmx Child & Family Services Society (Thompson Cariboo)
- Northwest Inter-Nation Family & Community Services Society (North West)
- Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council USMA Family and Child Services (North Vancouver Island)
- Scw'exmx Child & Family Services Society (Thompson/Cariboo)
- Secwepemc Child & Family Services (Thompson/Cariboo)
- Surrounded by Cedar Child & Family Services (South Vancouver Island)
- Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society (Vancouver/Richmond)

Community Agencies

- Adoptive Families Association of BC
- Axis Family Services
- BC Federation of Foster Parents
- Collective Impact TRRUST
- Community Bridge
- FBCYICN - Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks
- FCSSBS - Federation of Community Social Services of BC
- FPSSS - Foster Parent Support Services Society
- Foundry
- Hollyburn
- Interior Community Services
- Okanagan Foster Parents
- Parent Support Services Society
- FBCYICN Steering Committee Meeting
- BCFFPA AGM

Other

- MCFD Staff
- Working Groups