

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

## SAJE Income Supports

AYA, Income Support & Earnings Exemption

### 1. Is it true that the Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) program is being phased out? What is replacing AYA?

Yes. Starting April 3, 2024, no new AYAs will be signed as the program is being gradually phased out and replaced by the broader Strengthening Abilities and Journeys of Empowerment (SAJE) program, which includes a suite of post-majority supports. The SAJE program is building upon and improving what AYA has historically offered, by providing increased flexibility and tailored support to meet young adults where they are at.

While no new AYAs will be signed beginning April 3, 2024, if you are a young adult who is currently on an AYA, you will continue to access the program without disruptions until your agreement concludes. Upon expiry of your current AYA and as eligible, you will be transitioned to a SAJE agreement. SAJE Guides, MCFD and Indigenous Child and Family Service Agency (ICFSA) workers will introduce you to any additional opportunities available to you through the SAJE program to ensure a smooth transition.

If you have questions about your agreement, you can visit [SAJE \(Strengthening Abilities and Journeys of Empowerment\) - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-human-resources/employment/aya) or contact a SAJE Guide, or MCFD's SAJE Provincial Support Services (SPSS) at [1-866-623-3001](tel:1-866-623-3001) or [MCF.SAJE@gov.bc.ca](mailto:MCF.SAJE@gov.bc.ca) to find out more.

ICFSAs may also have dedicated workers to assist Indigenous youth with planning for their transition to adulthood and accessing the SAJE program. If you are looking for an ICFSAs please visit [Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies/Delegated Aboriginal Agencies in BC - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-human-resources/employment/aya)

### 2. Why is AYA being phased out?

The SAJE program is intended to build upon and replace AYA. It includes a range of housing and income supports, transition planning support, improved health and wellness benefits, and funding to pursue educational, training, and cultural connections learning opportunities.

AYA was, until recently, the only legislated ministry support available to young adults past the age of 19. Since 2018, MCFD has engaged with approximately 3,000 British Columbians (including youth and young adults, caregivers, Indigenous peoples, community partners, Indigenous rights holders and Ministry and ICFSAs staff) to understand how to improve outcomes and better support youth and young adults transitioning from care into adulthood.

Through this process, the ministry learned that AYA provided inadequate transition planning supports, leaving many young adults feeling poorly equipped to navigate this critical time in their lives. Strict program requirements and limited flexibility also made it challenging for young adults to remain on AYA.

### 3. What funding is available through the new SAJE Income Support?

The Income Support (both unconditional and conditional) is a part of the broader suite of services available within the SAJE program. It is intended to support young adults by increasing financial stability and independence, help prevent the experience of homelessness and avoid long-term system dependence.

- The Unconditional Income Support (UIS) is available to eligible young adults with no requirement to participate in programming for up to 12 months (between a young person's 19th and 20th birthday);
- The Conditional Income Support (CIS) is available to support young adults with living costs while they participate in a post-secondary educational program; or a vocational training program; or attend a cultural program; rehabilitation program; a life-skills program or a combination of these programs, until their 27th birthday. While on CIS, program participation is required.

### 4. Am I eligible for the SAJE Income Support?

If you're between the ages of 19 and 26 and have some government care experience, you may be eligible to receive benefits under the SAJE program, including Income Support. The Income Support eligibility criteria are outlined below, and we recommend you reach out to a SAJE Guide, an ICFSA worker or MCFD's SAJE Provincial Support Services (SPSS) at [1-866-623-3001](tel:1-866-623-3001) or [MCF.SAJE@gov.bc.ca](mailto:MCF.SAJE@gov.bc.ca) to confirm your eligibility.

Starting April 4, 2024, if you are a young adult, between the ages of 19 to 20 (up to your 20<sup>th</sup> birthday) with any of the following care experiences, you can receive an Unconditional Income Support (UIS) of up to \$1,250/month to assist with living expenses. You are eligible for an UIS if you:

- Reached your 19th birthday on a Youth Agreement or Continuing Custody Agreement or under the personal guardianship of a director,

**OR**

- Achieved permanency (i.e., adoption after being in care, or under section 54.1 or 54.01) between the ages of 12-19,

**OR**

- Had 24 months of cumulative time in care between the ages of 12-19, in any care status excluding 54.1, 54.01 or adoption,

**OR**

- Were in a comparable arrangement under Indigenous law.

Following your 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, ongoing monthly support remains available until age 27 through the Conditional Income Support, if you are participating or enrolled in:

- a. Individualized or facilitated life-skills, rehabilitative, or cultural programming; for:
  - a minimum of five hours per week

**OR**

- b. Post-secondary educational; vocational; apprenticeship training or programs not covered by the Provincial Tuition Waiver Program (PTWP) / Learning for Future Grant (LFG)<sup>1</sup>
  - a minimum of 60% of a full-time course load;
  - a minimum of 40% of a full-time course load (if you have a permanent disability<sup>2</sup>),

**OR**

- c. A combination of educational, vocational, apprenticeship training, rehabilitative, life skills and/or cultural programming (a + b from above)

## 5. What other SAJE supports and benefits can I access while receiving Income Support?

If you are on a UIS or CIS, you are also eligible to receive:

- Medical, dental and optical benefits
- SAJE Mental Health and Counselling benefit
- Transition support from a SAJE Guide, or ICFSA equivalent
- Rent Supplement (only if on SAJE Support Agreement, not SAJE Housing Agreement)
- Provincial Tuition Waiver Program and Learning for Future Grant

## 6. How can I apply for Income Support?

Contact a SAJE Guide or MCFD's SAJE Provincial Support Services (SPSS) at [1-866-623-3001](tel:1-866-623-3001) or [MCF.SAJE@gov.bc.ca](mailto:MCF.SAJE@gov.bc.ca) to find out more information about the new Income Support.

ICFSAs may also have dedicated workers to assist Indigenous youth with planning for their transition to adulthood and accessing the SAJE program. If you are looking for an ICFSA please visit [Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies/Delegated Aboriginal Agencies in BC - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov2/indigenous_child_and_family_service_agencies/delegated_aboriginal_agencies_in_bc_-_province_of_british_columbia)

## 7. Is the SAJE Income Support only going to be available to youth who are turning 19 or are 19 now? What about young adults who are 20-21?

Beginning in April 2024, young adults can access Unconditional Income Support between the ages of 19 and 20 (up to their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday). Conditional Income Support is available to young adults starting at age 20 up to their 27<sup>th</sup> birthday, if they are participating in eligible educational, training, rehabilitative, life skills and/or cultural connections programming.

## 8. What is the Earnings Exemption?

The earnings exemption means that employment income is no longer a factor in determining financial need under the SAJE program. If you are working, you will not see a reduction in your monthly Income Support payments due to employment income. This change is intended to provide financial stability for young adults, while encouraging employment and participation in paid training programs.

## 9. What is considered employment income?

The ministry defines employment income as: any salary, wages, commissions, and other remuneration, including gratuities, allowances, and bonuses received by the young adult in exchange for the provision of goods or services. This includes income earned through self-employment opportunities or wage replacements, such as Employment Insurance or Worker's Compensation Benefits.

Social support benefits provided by other government ministries, for example Income Assistance from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, are not the same as earnings/employment and may be subject to recovery by the other ministry/agency.

All young adults are encouraged to consult with their worker and ensure they are complying with program reporting.