

FBCYICN and MCFD YAC Town Hall

April 5th, 2020

Please note that all questions are exactly as youth/young adults have word them

Moderators

- Thank you for submitting advanced questions.
- Youth have said that they want the questions read out during the town hall “so the youth can hear, and I can share back to the youth if they are unable to attend”.
- Questions have been themed to eliminate repetition
- If we do not get to all the pre-submitted questions, the answers can be posted for others to see.
- Moderators will gauge the timing to transition from prepared questions and answers to live audience and whiteboard questions.

AYA specific

1. **Most schools are going to be online, take for instance the program you want to head into won't do their selection week. What support will be put in place during that time? Will you be allowed on aya even though you aren't in school?**

What happens for youth currently on the aya program with expiring contracts? If they are transitioning out of their post-secondary courses but unable to find work due to the pandemic?

If you are currently in the AYA Program, your funding will not be impacted even if your programming, training program or institution has been interrupted due to the pandemic. You will continue to receive your monthly financial support, and there is more work being done to sort out how this might affect the overall time in the program.

2. **What are they doing for youth who have aged out and don't qualify for aya's during this time?**

For those young adults who are eligible for the AYA program, we have developed a Temporary Life Skills Program to increase the accessibility to AYA. 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 available supports, like the B.C. Emergency Benefit for Workers and the Federal Emergency Care Benefit.

3. **Will the level of funding be increased during these times to youth both on YAGs and AYA?**

For people on AYA are we going to be receiving additional supports for groceries and such during this time?

The level of funding you currently receive will remain the same however, if you need any additional supports to manage COVID-19 contact your AYA worker or your Social Worker.

4. **How are youth on AYA and ILA receiving precautionary measures? I am on AYA and I have received an email saying if I need disinfectant or Tylenol if sick to reach out to my worker but how is this possible when all stores are sold out? YAC**

We are finding that the demand (power buying) that was happening seems to have slowed down and stores are starting to catch up and have stock available. However, if stores where you are are still sold out and/or you need support to purchase additional supplies please reach out to your AYA worker.

5. What actions are being taken by ministry employees in front line offices to flatten the curve?

The Ministry has done quite a bit of work in a pretty short period of time. We have shifted some staff and services to online platforms. We have implemented interim practice directives for youth justice, resources, child and youth with special needs, child and you with mental health, child protection and guardianship, adoption and administrative services so they can safely work with children, youth, families and community partners.

Custody Centers

6. How is MCFD protecting youth confined to their custody centres? e.g. cleaning more often, ENSURING that areas are cleaned by adults instead of leaving it up to youth to keep their areas clean? Are youth being tested during intake? Have there been any cases of COVID-19? (I'm pretty sure they won't answer any of this.)

Within our youth custody centers, we have taken steps to ensure the health and well-being of youth and staff by not allowing the general public to enter the buildings. We know that connections with family and community stakeholders are crucial so we have changed the format of in person visits to telephone and/or video to ensure that those connections continue to be made. We are using an approved screening process and following all recommended sanitation and cleaning procedures. Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer, is providing daily updates on the COVID-19 virus and recommendations.

Accessing Technology

7. Youth wanted this read out to the group:

Many youth in care do not have access to technology. Many of us have been told that we have to be sober, “make positive choices”, or connecting to services, or "earn it" to get access to tech like cellphones, laptops, and internet. Right now many youth in care are feeling more disconnected than ever. We all are. Due to COVID 19 many youth have been told their services, counsellors, youth workers, probation officers, teachers and social workers are working from home or onto virtual platforms—so is our learning. This impacts our mental health, safety, future goals, healing journeys, probation orders, overall wellbeing, families, communities, and care plans. Additionally, many youth in care were unable to attend today’s town hall to advocate for themselves and the youth in care community, and learn today due to the inaccessibility of technology and the chosen platform of this town hall. This issue goes beyond the Telus Mobility program, because that program doesn’t work for youth IN care or on youth agreements. What are you doing to ensure that ALL youth CURRENTLY in care or on youth agreements, or living in out of care placements are having access to the cellphones, laptops, and the internet they need to connect to their circle of supports, family, friends, their cultural teachers, access the virtual services, youth workers, phone into with their mandated probation meetings, and access out learning?

How is MCFD going to support the youth in and aging out of care during the social distancing with mental health support? As some may not have access to internet or telephones for online counselling services and mental health care.

This time of physical distancing is a new reality for everyone and it is important now more than ever that you are staying connected. If you are needing technology supports, please contact your social worker or the local ministry offices. It is important that you have the resources that you need to stay connected and we have been working hard to ensure that we can help children, youth, family and care givers stay connected.

For children and youth in care or aging out of care that need mental health supports and information they need to talk with their social workers. If they are lacking the resources, they need to connect with the virtual services that have been set up the social worker will make sure they have the technology they need to access those supports.

Extending Time in Care

- 8. Wondering if Community Care Licensing policy makers were involved in this planning. I don't think that they will allow a licensed home to keep a youth after 19. Exemptions would likely not be approved by Licensing Officers, so the approval would have to come from the region's Medical Health Officers.**

This is a great question, we will be working on these details resource by resource and on a case by case basis as each circumstance is so unique and we still have work to do.

- 9. What about youth who already aged out and had to leave their homes last week or last month? Does this apply retroactively?**

What date is considered the start of the pandemic?

Although things started around the world a lot earlier than here in BC, we are going to reach back as far as January 1, 2020 for those individuals who have aged out of care. If you or anyone you know is in that situation, please have them connect with us. We have set up a few call-in options and we will make sure that you have the number available.

1-800-663-9122; or Your local MCFD office or Delegated Aboriginal Agency (link to list of these with numbers); or If you would like support to do this, we encourage you to contact the Representative for Children and Youth at rcy@rcybc.ca or call 1-800-476-3933.

Child Safety –

- 10. What is being done to ensure children and youth whose families were being investigated by MCFD but not yet removed or placed with a family member. How is MCFD ensuring these children are safe in this time?**

What is MCFD doing for children who are removed from their parents during this time? Cuz that breaks social distancing technically.

The ministry or Delegated Aboriginal Agency workers will need to continue to assess safety and provide services to children, youth, families and communities. We will use virtual options when we

can but there will be times that we will have to our work in person. When we need to do our work in person, we will do this in a very careful way that follows the recommendations of Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry. We will take all the necessary steps to minimize the risk of exposure to children, youth, families and the staff.

- 11. For children in care who were supposed to have to move to a different home on their 12th birthday, will they be allowed to stay, in order to preserve self-isolation?**

I know I'm asking hard questions to which there is likely no good answer, and it's honestly a nightmare to even imagine the logistics they have to navigate. But, the safety of our children and youth always comes first, so I don't feel too bad for asking...

And what if current children in care have to change placements?

You should not feel bad for asking hard questions, these are difficult times for you and for everyone and we really need to look at each situation and sort out the best way forward on a case by case basis as each of you and your situations are unique and may require a different path forward.

Our collective goal is always to ensure placement stability however there are going to be times that a placement move needs to happen, so if a move needs to take place it will be done with careful consideration of who is in the home, what the immediate needs of everyone involved are and always ensuring that we are doing our best to minimize the risk of exposure to COVID-19 by following the guidance and recommendations of Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry.

- 12. Are guardianship workers still maintaining contact with their kids? They have been deemed an essential service and how is that being lived out? (YAC)**

Guardianship workers are finding creative ways, virtually to remain connected to children and youth who are in care and as in other areas of our work, if a child or youth is struggling and in person connection is needed we will do this in a way that follows the recommendations of Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry and provide service while minimizing contact and risk of exposure to clients and staff.

Our main goal is to continue to make sure that children and youth in care know that we care about them and want to ensure they are supported.

- 13. How will after hours continue to serve youth throughout this pandemic?**

Afterhours will continue to operate, and you can call Provincial Centralized Screening and the support numbers at any time. That number is 1-800-663-9122

- 14. How are youth getting the information about Covid 19? It seems like there is a disconnect between the main concern being the liability surrounding this rather than the people. YAC**

We appreciate the work being done to support youth in and leaving care during this time. We are seeing a lot of supports being dedicated to youth aging out of care, and we are curious what is being done to ensure youth in care are being supported.

We want you to know that our goal is make sure that all of the children and youth in care with MCFD or Delegated Aboriginal agencies feel supported and cared about. We understand how it could seem

like we are focusing on the youth leaving care or on AYAs as there has been messaging about that this week.

Social workers are reaching out to all children, youth and young adults on their caseload to ensure they have what they need. This includes many things including information and technology so they can stay connected and we are providing additional supports if needed. We are also talking with care givers and care providers to make sure that they have the supports in place to ensure the children, youth & young adults they are caring for have what they need. We are focused on connecting children and youth virtually with their families, extended families and communities and in some cases, exceptions are being made for in person contact. When in person contact is necessary, we are making sure everyone is following the recommendations of Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry.

We have sent youth in care, on a Youth Agreement and on the AYA program the relevant and reliable resource information on COVID-19 through the mail, posted the letters on internet and forwarded them to agencies across the province so that they can help us to ensure that you have the information you need. If some how you did not get the information, please reach out to your social worker, check on line, MCFD has a page specific for youth, and many DAAs have information on their websites and AgedOut.com has great information on their web page under the health and wellness tab. You can check out the most up to date advice of Dr. Bonnie our Provincial Health Officer online as well.

- 15. Many youths currently in care are without placements, living in shelters, or in youth justice programs, sleeping in “bail beds”, or on the streets. Many of these youth are facing additional risk with reduced frontline support presence, reduced transit, reduced face to face check ins, and reduced access to drop in spaces, which for many means increased food insecurity, increased physical harm, increased substance use engagement, and increased mental health concerns. As a result, many of these youth are unable to follow the health precautions being shared by our government, "our parents", not by choice, but due to a lack of secure and safe living conditions. What is being done to ensure that these youth are being provided with placements to keep them safe from the added layer of additional risk from COVID 19?**

This is a time when vulnerable youth can become more vulnerable. This is also a concern for us and for others across government and are we are working to determine what additional supports can be offered. For right now though, our offices are open and if youth who are vulnerable and needing safe housing and want to find a placement, we are strongly encouraging them to call the ministry offices or Provincial Centralized Screening 1-800-663-9122 and speak with a social worker. We will help to explore placement options, reconnecting with family and community.

Wellbeing

- 16. How is MCFD ensuring that children and youths mental health needs are still being met in this time?**

First and foremost, if there are children and youth in care or aging out of care that need mental health supports and information they need to talk with their social workers, especially if they are lacking the resources, they need to connect with the virtual services that have been set up.

Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) services are being adjusted to follow the recommendations of Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry. To serve clients safely in their homes, as Joanne said there are approximately 500 CYMH workers in the province that are providing services primarily virtually, or by phone so that they can maintain physical distancing.

There are significant resources located on the government website and on AgedOut.com

17. How will those receiving service in rural and remote communities continue to be supported accessing services.?

How will all of these situations differ in rural and remote communities?

As we transition to virtual platforms, there may be increased access to much needed services on line. There are increased mental health resources, wellness resources, and federal and provincial programs available to help support youth and young adults.

For children, youth and young adults living in Indigenous communities that are saying no one in or out during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic we are working with them to make sure they have the supports they need to stay connected and be able to access the online supports.

Youth with elevated risk to contract or spread COVID-19

18. How and who is communicating the guidelines and supports for youth in care who are street entrenched and high risk of exposure?

For some youth and young adults physical distancing is a challenge and results in an elevated level of risk according to the Provincial Health Officer guidelines and this increases the odds of contracting (or spreading) coronavirus. This is especially challenging for youth who are participating in activities that may cause them harm or have difficulties understanding the consequences to themselves and to others.

There is work in progress at all levels. There is cross government work happening to support vulnerable youth in the community with each community developing vulnerable population plans. We are asking social workers to reach out on a regular basis to youth who are engaged in high risk activities, who are AWOL or who are marginally connected and for service providers in that young person's circle to provide reliable health information and connect them to available resources and indoor shelter options in their area.

19. How will youth be notified when the pandemic clears about their aging out process? Will there be a grace period for transitioning or a hard deadline?

What dialogue will be given to those who receive extended funding when the pandemic clears?

As COVID-19 continues to evolve we will continue to provide regular updates and clear direction on when we are transitioning away from a pandemic response. The ministry will take its guidance from the Provincial Health Officer and align with broader government approaches to determine the term of emergency pandemic measures.

These are interim, emergency steps we're taking to ensure youth don't fall through the cracks during this pandemic. Our goal is always to ensure your well-being and we will continue to work in that way through this time.