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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Children and Family Development

### **Province provides emergency fund for children with special needs**

VICTORIA – The B.C. government is providing a new Emergency Relief Support Fund and added service flexibility for parents of children with special needs to help during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We have been hearing from families of children with special needs that they are facing a lot of uncertainty right now,” said Katrine Conroy, Minister of Children and Family Development. “We want to help, so we’re offering these families emergency funding and allowing more flexibility in our supports. Our government is committed to helping make life a little easier during this unprecedented and very challenging time.”

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is establishing an Emergency Relief Support Fund for children and youth with special needs and their families. The fund will provide a direct payment of \$225 per month to eligible families over the next three months (to June 30, 2020).

Using a needs-based approach, the emergency funding will support 50% more of the eligible families that are currently awaiting services. This payment can be used to purchase supports that help alleviate stress. These could include:

- meal preparation and grocery shopping assistance;
- homemaking services
- caregiver relief support (e.g., funded support to allow a family member to provide temporary care for a child or youth);
- counselling services, online or by phone; and
- and other services that support family functioning.

Policy guidelines for many Children and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) services will be more flexible to ensure families continue to benefit from other funding and supports, even as access to many in-person school and community-based services remain limited:

- Families with children in care on a special needs agreement or a voluntary care agreement will not have to make monthly maintenance payments for the duration of the pandemic period. This will provide temporary relief to parents who may be struggling with income or housing insecurity related to the pandemic.
- Supported Child Development and Aboriginal Supported Child Development programs will be able to extend extra staffing during school hours to help with the reduced availability of school-based services. Children of parents who are essential service providers and need extra staffing supports for their child will continue to receive those throughout the pandemic period.

- Eligibility and access to At Home Program medical benefits will be relaxed, and any families receiving benefits will continue to do so without the need for a reassessment during the pandemic period.
- Parameters on services purchased with Autism Funding will be expanded, allowing families to use up to 35% of funding to purchase equipment and items that assist in home learning and virtual instructional approaches.
- Families may direct their child's Autism Funding to access family counselling and therapy services with a qualified provider for all age categories accessing the Autism Funding program.

MCFD recognizes that each child and family faces unique circumstances and has unique needs. Families are encouraged to reach out to their CYSN worker to see how they can benefit from emergency help.

The Emergency Relief Support Fund is sustained by a \$900,000 investment. This is part of government's \$5-billion COVID-19 Action Plan to provide income supports, tax relief and direct funding for people, businesses and services.

#### **Quick Facts:**

- About 30,000 children and youth with special needs access CYSN services.
- MCFD provides autism funding to families of more than 16,000 children and youth diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.
- There are approximately 275 families with children on a Special Needs Agreement or Voluntary Care Agreement.
- Families of more than 6,300 children with special needs access Supported Child Development or Aboriginal Supported Child Development programs.
- Parents and guardians of school-aged children who are looking for education supports are urged to contact their school principal. The Ministry of Education frequently updates FAQs for families online: <https://www.gov.bc.ca/safeschools>

#### **Learn More:**

For the latest medical updates, including case counts, prevention, risks and testing, visit: <http://www.bccdc.ca>

Or follow @CDCofBC on Twitter,

For the provincial health officer's orders, notices and guidance, visit:

[www.gov.bc.ca/phoguidance](http://www.gov.bc.ca/phoguidance)

For non-health related information, including financial, child care and education supports, travel, transportation and essential service information, visit: [www.gov.bc.ca/Covid-19](http://www.gov.bc.ca/Covid-19)

Or call 1 888 COVID19 (1 888 268-4319) between 7:30 a.m. and 8 p.m., seven days a week.

**Contact:**

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