



AUTISM
SUPPORT NETWORK

For Immediate Release

BC Emergency Fund for Special Needs Not Enough to Make a Difference

April 9th, 2020: Yesterday the BC Government announced an emergency fund for children and youth with special needs that does little to address the barriers to treatment and services that these individuals and families are faced with right now. There are many vulnerable families who are likely to succumb to immense levels of stress with no support in place for them during this difficult time.

In normal times, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), provides limited funding for therapy and equipment, that expire on the child's sixth birthday; and a lesser amount after six, until eighteen. It is widely known and accepted in the scientific community that early and on-going intervention allows children on the autism spectrum to live a more fulfilling life.

Despite multiple petitions and parents asking for funding expiration dates to be extended, this has NOT been implemented, and in the contrary, specifically stated this would not occur. Children continue aging through this crisis, and not extending the expiration dates so that they can continue receiving services when and if life returns to normal, should be considered nothing short of punitive.

The BC Gov release states "Using a needs-based approach, the emergency funding will support 50% more of the eligible families that are currently awaiting services". This statement is unclear, in that it neither defines "eligible", nor "awaiting services". This lack of clarity continues to contribute stress to the families in need.

Furthermore, the lack of flexibility and reasoning demonstrated by the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development at this difficult time reveals an alarming absence of understanding regarding the challenges faced by children with autism and other special needs and their families during this current public health crisis.

Recommendations:

- That ALL children who receive autism funding, have their funding year extended for as long as schools remained closed and social distancing is mandated, and that regular funding should not be lost;
- That ALL children eligible for autism funding receive funding prorated at the under 6 years rate with no time limit on the funding to allow families and schools to work together to provide what will be required for these students to catch up again. Once this is over and school is back these families will be dealing with a high significant amount of regression and will need extra supports; and
- That ALL families – not 50% as in the release –receive respite funding
- Respite funding should be significantly increased for children with severe autism.

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Government release found here - <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020CFD0043-000650>

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