

Weekly Q/A on COVID-19: For disability service providers

Many FSCD families are struggling with balance between addressing the extraordinary needs of their children with disabilities while also trying to meet the demands of working from home during COVID-19. Will FSCD families be able to access additional funding for work-related child care?

Families who have children living with disabilities always face more challenges than other Albertans families but right now, every family in Alberta is faced with challenges in trying to find child care while their children are out of school or not able to go to a day care setting due to it being closed. We know all Albertan families – including families who have children living with disabilities - are relying heavily on other family members, extended family and friends, their neighbours and others to help with child care and other needs while trying to manage through this difficult time. We also encourage parents to work with their employer to identify options that can help them balance their family's needs and expectations related to their employment.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there may be unique circumstances where, due to a child's extraordinary and critical disability-related needs, and the pressure this can put on family unit stability, a decision may be made to amend the family's FSCD agreement to include additional FSCD services for a limited period of time—e.g., one or two months. The family should discuss these situations with their FSCD worker.

Many FSCD families are currently unable to access supports for their children if their service providers have cancelled or suspended services due to COVID-19. Is there an option for families to "pause" their contracts so that they can retain their contract dollars to use once service providers open again?

Services remain in family agreements until the agreement's end date. Regional FSCD staff have been instructed to work with FSCD families to flexibly manage existing FSCD agreement budgets so that families can use existing resources most effectively to access disability support services that remain available during the pandemic. Options are also being explored to make agreement renewals easier for families.

Many FSCD families who are still able to access supports and services are concerned about burning through their contract dollars during COVID-19 (for example, parents using respite/community aide hours to support working from home, or to support their child's education when learning from home). Alternatively, families need extra support at home during these extraordinary circumstances when schools and other programs (e.g. summer camps) are expected to be closed indefinitely. Some FSCD families report being told that no addendums are being approved right now. Are contract addendums available to families, and under what circumstances?

FSCD families need specific mental health supports. Where can they find such supports, and can they use their FSCD contract dollars to access mental supports (both for the child and the parent)?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there may be unique circumstances where, a child's extraordinary and critical disability-related needs and the pressure this puts on family unit stability, mean that a decision can be made to amend the family's FSCD agreement to include additional FSCD services for a limited period of time—e.g., one or two months. The family should discuss these situations with their FSCD worker.

Families are encouraged to consider the resources that may be available to them through their private and/or employee health plans. Families may also be able to access counselling to assist the family in caring for their child with a disability through FSCD agreements. If this is not in the family's current FSCD agreement, the family is encouraged to contact their FSCD worker and explore utilizing existing resources flexibly so that mental health supports can be accessed.

Families can also learn more about available mental health supports through Alberta Health Services webpage at [Help in Tough Times](#).

Many FSCD families - particularly those in rural or remote communities - have seen their respite options significantly diminished during COVID-19. Families would like the option of hiring another family member to provide respite during this extraordinary time, but have been told by their caseworker this is not an available option. Given that FSCD is moving to allow families as much flexibility as possible within their existing contracts, is family-provided respite available?

Respite can be provided by an adult family member who is not a parent and in the opinion of the director is the most appropriate when there are no other options available. The family member cannot be a guardian or a member of the household of the guardian and the child.

If a family has previously requested to use a family member and has been denied, they are encouraged to reconnect with their FSCD worker about their request, which may include discussion about the Concerns Resolution process.

While everyone appreciates that we are dealing with unprecedented times, the importance of timely communication with FSCD families cannot be underestimated. Some families are wondering why they are not receiving information directly from FSCD, instead of getting the information through other channels or organizations. Or why they are receiving some information directly from FSCD (e.g. Edmonton Region communication re. PPE) but other information is being distributed through other organizations or networks (e.g. March 25 ADM letter). Is there a way to enhance communication coordination between FSCD and families?

Who and how are the PPE requests for service providers being assessed for shipment? (Deliveries have been sporadic and amounts vary from the requests submitted).

What is the process for service providers to replenish PPE supplies? (Providers are receiving partial or minimal orders).

CSS continues to seek opportunities to continuously improve communication with families and service providers. This includes looking at how to share resources and information with approximately 19,000 families through email while using other methods (e.g. sharing information and resources through groups such as ALIGN Association of Community Services and the Provincial Parent Advisory Committee (PPAC)) to ensure those without email or access to email also receive information and resources in a timely fashion. Additionally, The Minister recently hosted a teleconference town hall with families and service providers on Friday, April 24th.

Finally, some pandemic communications will continue to be managed centrally through the office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health as is required under government's emergency management protocols.

The Provincial Operations Centre (POC) is assessing and fulfilling orders for PPE. Alberta Health Services (AHS) is providing PPE to POC for distribution to many health and social services organizations who require it. The demand for PPE is unprecedented due to the pandemic and both AHS and the POC are working hard to meet the demands from the disability sector.

If you have received a partial order, the remainder of the order will be filled as soon as possible. Once your order is filled, it will not be automatically replenished and you need to re-order PPE to replace inventory that has been used. It's expected that orders will be placed and filled on a two-week cycle.

How will service providers know what & when they are getting supplies so they can implement consistent practices for staff to follow?

You may check with your regional office for information about the status of your PPE order. Regional staff continue to work closely with the POC about your needs for PPE.

How can my family receive masks for FSCD workers or workers I employ using a PDD family managed services (FMS) agreement?

CSS staff have emailed or mailed information to all families receiving FSCD supports and PDD supports through FMS agreements and provided a form to order masks for their support workers. Upon completing these forms, families can either pick up masks or they can be delivered.

Families can then submit an order for additional masks one week after receiving their previous supply.

Are PDD-funded agencies going to be billed for the supplies received from the government system and if so, how will this billing system work?

PPE, masks and extra cleaning supplies are supply costs that are essential to ensure the safety of staff and the people you serve. At this time, there is no decision about how billing for PPE will be addressed, but this is will be resolved shortly. Finally, please note that CSS recognizes the extraordinary financial pressures on FSCD and PDD agreements because of the pandemic.

ADWA (Alberta Disability Workers Association) is doing a social media campaign to promote the value and importance of the Disability Support Workforce. How will CSS promote the value of the workforce as well? The government has identified this workforce as essential and this workforce is struggling to meet the demands on them right now. Public recognition by government of the value and importance and echoing ADWAs messaging about this would be helpful.

CSS appreciates and values the supports and services provided by Alberta's disability workers at all times and especially during this unprecedented pandemic situation. In response to this request, CSS will include a disability workforce story as a closing narrative at the end of each CSS Disability Sector Weekly COVID-19 Q & A beginning with next week's (May 5th post).