

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

Is there any consideration being given to resuming any of FSCD's group therapies, such as those that work development and practice of social skills, now that some restrictions are being eased in the province?

Government is providing direction on the relaunch of Alberta's economy and the associated programs and services that have been disrupted by the pandemic based on advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and public health evidence. As restrictions ease, service providers who provide disability programs and services are expected to continue providing essential care and support services within the directions set by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and may also follow guidelines set by professional colleges or regulators. Any resumption of non-essential services will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the capacity of the provider and the service location to operate safely within all ongoing restrictions.

Parents are encouraged to speak directly with their service provider if they have questions about the resumption of any services that have been paused because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

How do non-residential programs and FASD supports and services tie into the provincial relaunch strategy and when can they begin to reopen?

Community and Social Services (CSS) is working with the office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the PDD Service Provider Partnership Committee to create guidelines to inform disability service providers about the relaunch of their non-residential supports programs. The target is to have this work complete over the next few weeks to inform the possible relaunch of disability day programs and other non-residential programs in Stage 2 and Stage 3 of Alberta's relaunch strategy dependent on the specifics of each program or service. Of course any relaunch of non-residential disability programs and services will be required to follow all public health orders and safety guidelines, including physical distancing, using good hygiene and maintaining enhanced disinfecting practices.

Service providers, stakeholders, disability services staff and all Albertans are encouraged to visit www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans frequently for the most up-to-date information on public health orders, safety guidelines and measures, and Alberta's relaunch strategy.

Please note that the relaunch stages may change or be adjusted depending on current circumstances

As service delivery starts to shift and adjust to now include virtual delivery, the concept of regional and geographical boundaries in our pre-COVID environment may need to be reconsidered. How would CSS address regional boundaries in an environment of virtual delivery, while ensuring regional factors are considered?

Community and Social Services is not considering any changes to its six designated regions at this time. On-line service provision has always been a service delivery option based on the needs of Albertans living with disabilities and their families, as well as the capacity and interest of service providers to delivery programs through alternate means.

Recent CSS communication to FSCD families indicates that families can put their Specialized Services or Behavioral/Developmental Aide Supports on hold and extend their contract when appropriate. What is the expectation for contracted service providers during this 'hold' period?

We understand some families, based on their particular situation, are putting a hold on their services, and service providers are looking at options to adjust services accordingly. Service providers, PDD FMS agreement administrators and FSCD families are encouraged to contact their respective Contract and Procurement Specialist/CSS Disability worker to discuss their specific circumstances and seek appropriate guidance and support.

A disability worker story...

As we all know, the disabilities sector has been doing a great job in following the guidelines established by the Chief Medical Officer of Health to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and, as a result, there have only been a handful of confirmed cases of the novel corona virus in disability group homes or in the overall disability community. This outstanding prevention record is a credit to the diligence and dedication of Alberta's disability workers, our self-advocate community, disability service providers, and Alberta families who have a family member living with disability. Even though it has been hard to adhere to social distancing rules, strict hand hygiene, and appropriate use of protective equipment; Alberta's disability sector has risen to the challenge.

To underscore this dedication, we need to applaud all the disability workers who continue to provide supports to Albertans living with disability and especially to the handful of workers who continue to provide in-home supports to the few Albertans with disabilities who have, unfortunately, become infected with COVID-19. By appropriately using personal protective equipment, these workers have continued to work in their group homes and because of this have had to isolate themselves from their own families and friends in order to keep their loved safe. This is an exemplary example of the dedication of Alberta's disability workforce.