

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

With physical distancing and gathering size restrictions being followed, will modified versions of community access services be encouraged to resume in Stage 1 of Alberta's relaunch strategy?

Community and Social Services is working with our disability sector partners and Alberta Health to determine when and how disability program community access services can reactivate. It is important that we have considered all the risks associated with re-starting these services before we commit to a reactivation plan.

As community access increases across Alberta, everyone is still required to follow the guidelines set by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Anyone who is over 60 years of age, and/or has underlying medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases) and/or a compromised immune system is at higher risk for complications from COVID-19.

To help limit the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the risk of getting sick:

- Plan your activity in advance to ensure physical distancing as much as possible – consider non-peak hours, walking alongside the trails and other public pathways to maintain distance.
- Practice good hand hygiene.
- Wear a non-medical mask in public places to help limit the risk of spread of others if you will be within 2 metres of people other than members of your own household.
- Assess the risk:
 - Does the activity violate a public health order?
 - Does the activity involve contact with frequently touched surfaces or objects?
 - Can the activity proceed with physical distancing in place?

For more information, please visit the [Alberta Health Services website](#).

How has CSS been working with Education to support children with disabilities learning from home?

Recognizing that many families have questions about at-home learning, a provincial education helpline is now available to parents where Alberta Education staff will address their questions and direct them to their school authorities, where applicable.

The intent is to provide advice to families, particularly to parents of children with disabilities, who have questions about their child's program now that the traditional delivery process has changed. Parents can reach the helpline by calling

780-422-6548 (toll-free by dialing 310-0000, followed by the 10-digit phone number) or by emailing studentsupport@gov.ab.ca.

Additionally, the ministry of Education has been in regular conversation with Community and Social Services during the pandemic to seek advice on how to best support families with children with disabilities while our education system is not able to provide in-person programming. Families with children with disabilities are encouraged to speak directly to their local school or school division to confirm their child's education needs so that their local educators can continue to provide needed services within the context of the pandemic reality.

Recently Prime Minister Trudeau announced a \$2/hr wage increase for essential workers. Has Alberta received this additional money and will it be distributed to our workforce without having organizations find the money within their current contracts?

The Government of Alberta values the dedication of essential workers and appreciates the additional funding made available to the provinces. Alberta, along with other provinces and territories continues to work with the government of Canada and details on the distribution of funds have not been finalized. More information will be shared as soon as it is available.

Is the Ministry working with Education to ensure that the proper learning supports – including educational assistants – are in place for children with disabilities if schools re-open before the fall?

Yes. Regular funding will resume when schools are back in operation. Education funding is only temporarily reduced while in-person classes are cancelled.

CSS continues to engage with other departments, including Education, to ensure they are aware of needs for children with disabilities.

What is the Ministry doing to encourage service providers and other professionals to resume in-home supports?

CSS is neither encouraging nor discouraging service providers to resume in-home supports, but rather we continue to provide information on how in-home supports can safely continue or resume (for example, providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to service providers, information on public health orders, etc.).

Will PPE still be available for FSCD families to access even as other COVID-19 related restrictions start to ease?

We will continue monitoring families' need for PPE – particularly access to medical masks – as the relaunch strategy is implemented, and we will continue to work with Alberta Health Services (AHS) to determine how best to meet this need.

What is the Ministry doing to help streamline FSCD contract renewals during this time? Will the Ministry consider automatic renewals of FSCD contracts that would at least maintain a family's current funding levels?

CSS has an interim policy in place to support continuity of FSCD services for children and families receiving supports through FSCD agreements and amendments. This directive provides guidance to FSCD workers and guardians on accepting and activating an FSCD agreement or amendment. The interim FSCD policies can be found [here](#).

This added flexibility means that automatic FSCD agreement renewals are not necessary at this time. If guardians wish to discuss the renewal of their current agreement, they can meet with their worker virtually to have their needs assessed and renew their agreement as per existing practice.

The Premier recently announced a phased approach to ease COVID-19 restrictions on businesses and services. How will this phased approach affect FSCD families?

FSCD interim policies related to COVID-19 will remain in effect during the state of public health emergency in Alberta – including the phased approach period – and until they are rescinded by the FSCD statutory director.

The interim FSCD policies will remain until it is safe to remove them. Parents and guardians are encouraged to continue working with their service providers and their CSS FSCD workers to determine how services may be provided within the directions set by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the guidelines these have established for service delivery.

How will the Ministry support families of children with disabilities in going back to daycare?

FSCD's interim policies related to COVID-19 will remain in effect during Alberta's phased approach to ease pandemic restrictions. As daycares will not be at full capacity by May 14, guardians can continue using services in their FSCD agreement during the times their child would normally be in school or in a childcare setting and until the interim policies are rescinded.

Is consideration being given to establish a hotline for Albertans affected by disability to obtain online support?

Although a hotline is not currently under consideration, Alberta Supports remains available for all Albertans and is currently available online at <https://myalbertasupports.alberta.ca> or by phone at 1-877-644-9992.

In addition, disability agencies and individuals and families currently served by PDD or FSCD can continue to contact CSS staff directly as they do normally.

Can you make available a plain language explanation of the math of the new policy allowing AISH/Income Support to retain a portion of CERB?

The math for each client varies and is dependent on the client's household composition, who receives the CERB, other income in the household and their current agreement. You can find more information on the maximum income exemptions for clients receiving CERB [here](#). Also, please call Alberta Supports if you have questions or concerns.

Some individuals are concerned that there may be a medication shortage. Furthermore, people can only obtain medication one month at a time which is causing concern. Can you speak to this?

Prescriptions are currently being provided in quantities that do not exceed a 30-day supply in order to limit product shortages and allow continued access to medications for all Albertans.

Pharmacists still have the ability to exercise professional judgment when applying this guidance in order to ensure patient care or safety is not jeopardized. To avoid multiple trips to the pharmacy, check if the pharmacy can deliver medications to individuals' homes.

When there is no longer a need for these measures, the 30-day supply limit will cease and pharmacists will resume their usual practices.

Are there staffing supports available for individuals or families with FMS or self-managed care contracts who are struggling to find staffing during this crisis?

PDD workers will help FMS administrators identify service delivery options to address the support needs.

If a FMS administrator, or an individual with a self-managed care contract, needs additional services because they can't access support from their personal support networks; PDD workers will help identify alternate service delivery and support options.

The PDD worker can explore the possibility of hiring a family member when other options are not available.

- The paid family member cannot be a guardian or FMS administrator.
- The paid family member cannot displace any existing staff that is able to provide the service.
- The particular support or service being providing must be essential and necessary and be different than the support this family member would typically provide to the individual.