

ACT's Autism Manual for B.C.

Living and Working with Children and Adults with ASD

Chapter 4: MCFD-FUNDED SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH ASD

Contributed by ACT - Autism Community Training information staff



Chapter Contents

Chapter 4: MCFD-funded Services for Children with ASD

<i>The Autism Funding Program</i>	4–3
Types of Autism Programs and How to Access Them.....	4–3
Applying for the Autism Funding Program	4–5
The Invoice Payment Process	4–8
Understanding the Funding Agreement Before Signing	4–8

The “Introduction to ACT’s Autism Manual for B.C.” provides valuable context to this chapter. Download at: www.actcommunity.ca/autism-manual.

4 MCFD-FUNDED SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH ASD

Once a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has received a diagnosis, parents start to focus on finding treatment and other supports for their child and their family. This involves not only exploring the treatment options but also finding out how they can be funded.

This chapter focuses on the Autism Funding Program, administered by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

A primary role of ACT – Autism Community Training is to act as an information resource for families and the community professionals who support them. This manual is only one source of information. ACT’s Information Officers are available to help families and those who support them by telephone and email wherever they live in B.C. If you have questions about any of the following information, contact ACT at info@actcommunity.ca, toll-free at 1-866-939-5188, or 604-205-5467 for Metro Vancouver.



Autism
Information
Database

“Like Google for Autism but Better!”

Throughout this chapter you will see AID links that connect to resources:
www.actcommunity.ca/aid-search/

ACT’s Autism Information Database (AID) has over 2000 autism-related information and community resources. It is easy to search using keywords and postal codes, which saves time in finding B.C. resources. There are links to excellent international websites on a wide range of topics relevant to children, youth and adults with ASD and their families, which community professionals may also find helpful. ACT’s staff has reviewed each of the resources we have included — our focus is on providing practical, useful resources that empower families and communities. Do you have a community resource to recommend for the AID? Go to www.actcommunity.ca/submit-resource/

To provide ACT with new information and/or corrections to include in manual updates, e_mail info@actcommunity.ca.

The information in this section has been organized as follows, although there is overlap between the sections:

- The Autism Funding Program
 - Types of Autism Programs
 - › Autism Funding: Under Age 6
 - › Autism Funding: Ages 6–18
 - Applying for the Autism Funding Program
 - › For those with a B.C. Autism Assessment Network Diagnosis
 - › For those with a private B.C. diagnosis
 - › For those with an out-of-province/out-of-country diagnosis
 - › For those who have a diagnosis dated prior to April 1, 2004
 - The Invoice Payment Process
 - Understanding the Funding Agreement Before Signing
 - › Autism Funding: Under Age 6
 - › Autism Funding: Ages 6–18
 - A Brief History of Autism Funding in B.C.

This chapter should be read along with Chapter 2, “Developing an Autism Treatment Team for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder” and Chapter 5, “Contracting with Professionals on the RASP.”

THE AUTISM FUNDING PROGRAM

In British Columbia, the provincial government, through the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), has provided autism intervention funding to parents and guardians since 2002. While several other Canadian provinces provide autism treatment programs, parents in B.C. have considerably more responsibility for directing their child's treatment than in other jurisdictions.

It can be overwhelming to grapple with setting up a treatment program while still dealing with the impact of a diagnosis of autism. ACT is committed to providing impartial information to parents making these decisions. In addition to the information in Chapter 2, ACT has developed a “New Diagnosis Hub” online which has detailed information on the Autism Funding Programs. See www.actcommunity.ca/new-diagnosis-hub/. ACT Information Officers can advise parents on the process and can provide support in English and Chinese.

An important source of information from MCFD is *A Parent's Handbook: Your Guide to Autism Programs*. This booklet was updated in 2015 and contains helpful information for parents. See AID Resource www.actcommunity.ca/resource/377/. This information can also be sent to you by ACT if it is not readily accessible at your local MCFD office.

Types of Autism Programs and How to Access Them

MCFD provides two types of Autism Programs for children who qualify (see Chapter 1 for diagnostic requirements):

- Autism Funding: Under Age 6.
- Autism Funding: Ages 6-18.

Autism Funding: Under Age Six

This program is designed to provide money, up to \$22,000 per year, for families to purchase specific autism treatment services. The focus of intervention must be on the child's communication, social-emotional, pre-academic and functional life skills. The Government of B.C. recognizes that \$22,000 per year may represent only a portion of the costs of a full treatment program for a child with autism. Parents are expected to provide any additional funding required.

Although parents may feel they are able to justify certain expenditures because of their child's needs, Autism Funding is intended to be focused on intervention to improve the child's functioning and future outcomes rather than on the maintenance of the child as he or she is today. This means there



are many expenses that are not eligible under the Autism Funding Program. There may be other sources of funds to cover some of these expenses through MCFD. There is more information on this in Chapter 6, “MCFD Services Available to All Children with Special Needs.” Some expenses are considered to be the same as those a parent would spend on a child if he or she didn’t have autism and therefore are not eligible.

It is strongly recommended that a parent or guardian obtain the services of a qualified behavior consultant to develop a behavioral plan of intervention (BPI). This plan is to be individualized and based on the child’s unique strengths and challenges.

For more details of the BPI, see Chapter 2 of this manual, “Developing a Treatment Team for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder,” and MCFD’s *A Parent Handbook: Your Guide to Autism Programs*.

For all children with ASD in B.C. under six, when MCFD Autism Funding is used, the behavior consultant and other professionals must be selected from the Registry of Autism Service Providers (RASP). More information about choosing RASP professionals can be found in Chapter 2, “Developing a Treatment Team for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder.” The RASP listing can be accessed on ACT’s website at www.actcommunity.ca/rasp/.

ACT strongly advises parents to interview several behavior consultants before making a final decision—don’t rely on recommendations from others alone or allow yourself to be rushed into a decision by an over-enthusiastic service provider. It is especially important for parents to review alternative providers if they have received a private diagnosis from an agency that also provides treatment.

Autism Funding: Ages 6–18

Like the program for children under age six, this program is designed to provide funding, up to \$6,000 per year, for families to purchase autism intervention services. Unlike the under 6 program, this program has more flexibility regarding intervention choices and allowable expenses. The focus of intervention for this age group is to promote the child’s communication, social-emotional, academic and functional life skills development.

This program requires that parents or guardians ensure that the funds expended are spent outside of the child’s school/educational program. Funding a child’s school program is considered the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the school district or the independent school. See MCFD’s *A Parent’s Handbook: Your Guide to Autism Programs* for the specific differences between allowable expenses for the two autism funding programs.

Applying for the Autism Funding Program

Eligibility

An application to the Autism Funding Program may be made when:

- A child under six has received a diagnosis and assessment of ASD, using the required testing instruments, from a multidisciplinary team;
- A child six and over has received a diagnosis from an individual practitioner.

See Chapter 1, “The Diagnostic Process in British Columbia,” for details of the diagnostic process.

Providing the Correct Documentation

A child is eligible for funding from the first day of the month that MCFD receives all required documents, so it is vital to ensure that the right documents have been sent and that they have been received by MCFD.

The parent or guardian may fax them to the social worker so they can be reviewed before a meeting to avoid delays and to maximize the time period that the child is eligible for funding.

To find the MCFD office that serves your community, see AID Resource www.actcommunity.ca/resource/1996/. If you are having difficulty locating your local office, contact ACT.

It is best for the parent to telephone the MCFD office to confirm that the documents have been received. Take a note of the date and the name of the person who has confirmed receipt.

The following documents are required by the MCFD social worker to complete the application:

- The BCAAN Clinical Outcomes form or a Non-BCAAN (Private) Diagnosis of ASD form, showing a diagnosis of ASD.
- Proof of the child’s age (such as a birth certificate).
- The child’s BC Care Card.

MCFD’s “Application for Autism Funding” is available as an AID Resource www.actcommunity.ca/resource/335/ or can be requested from your local MCFD office or from ACT. Parents will also find other Autism Funding forms on this website.

Steps for the Parent to Take to Initiate Funding

1. As soon as possible after diagnosis contact your local MCFD office and initiate the application process. You will be asked a series of questions. Make a note of the date and time you called along with the name of the person(s) you spoke with.
2. A social worker will explain the application and funding process. You will be sent an information package. Make a note of the name of the social worker and the date and time you spoke with him or her.
3. If your child has received a diagnosis and assessment from a BC Autism Assessment Network (BCAAN) team your assessment documentation will be forwarded directly to MCFD, if you consented to this. You will also receive the same documentation from BCAAN. If your child has received a private assessment or an assessment from outside B.C. or Canada, see “If Your Child Does Not Have a BCAAN Diagnosis” below.
4. Once the child’s documentation has been received by MCFD, eligibility for funding will be verified and two copies of the Autism Agreement will be mailed to the family for signature — both copies must be returned to the Autism Funding Branch.
5. Renewal of the Invoice Payment Agreement is automatic on the month following the child’s birthday. With the renewal of the agreement comes assignment of a new billing number for the child’s service providers. A new “Request to Pay” form must be sent for each provider for each funding year.

Children with ASD in Care

Foster children with ASD are eligible for the Autism Funding Program. If a foster parent is concerned that the foster child has undiagnosed ASD or if the child has a confirmed ASD diagnosis but is not receiving treatment, this should be discussed with his or her guardianship worker. ACT Information Officers are available to provide support and information to community professionals and foster parents seeking a diagnosis for a child suspected of having ASD.

If Your Child Does Not Have a BCAAN Diagnosis

- **A Private Diagnosis Done in B.C.** – If you have arranged a private assessment the paperwork required is slightly different. The private assessor will provide you with the required documentation for the application process. A form for a private (non-BCAAN) diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder is available as an AID Resource at www.actcommunity.ca/resource/335/ or by calling 1-877-777-3530.

If your child is under six and you have opted for a private assessment, it is important to remember that for it to be accepted by MCFD, it must be a multi-disciplinary assessment. For a child six and over, a multi-disciplinary assessment is not currently required.

See Chapter 1, “The Diagnostic Process in British Columbia,” for important information on issues surrounding seeking a private diagnosis.

- **A Diagnosis from Another Canadian Province** – If your child received a diagnostic assessment from another Canadian province, you will be required to have a qualified B.C. specialist (pediatrician, psychiatrist or registered psychologist) complete a Confirmation of Previous Diagnosis form before you apply for MCFD Autism Funding Programs. A “Confirmation of Diagnosis” form can be requested by calling 1-877-777-3530 or is available as an AID Resource: www.actcommunity.ca/resource/335/.
- **A Diagnosis from Outside Canada** – If your child received a diagnosis outside of Canada, a qualified B.C. specialist must complete a Confirmation of Previous Diagnosis form (see above) before you can apply for Autism Funding. In some cases, families may be required to have a new diagnostic assessment done in B.C., if the specialist is unable to confirm the diagnosis.
- **In the Case of Children Diagnosed Prior to April 1, 2004** – Any child/youth who has a documented diagnosis of an ASD by a psychiatrist, pediatrician, neurologist, or registered psychologist prior to April 1, 2004 may be eligible for MCFD supports/funding without having to complete a re-assessment through BCAAN. A Confirmation of Previous Diagnosis form must be completed before you can apply for Autism Funding (see above for the link to the form).

**Autism Funding Branch
Contact Information**
Telephone: 1-877-777-3530
Email:
mcf.autismfundingunit@gov.bc.ca
Fax: (250) 356-8578

The Autism Funding Payment Process

Invoice Payment

MCFD's Autism Funding Branch administers autism funds for the child. The parent selects the services needed, within the requirements for eligible expenses, and the Autism Funding Branch pays the service provider directly. The service provider and the parent will be sent a letter with a billing number that must be put on any invoice submitted to the Autism Funding Branch. Parents will be reimbursed for eligible travel, training and equipment costs after they complete and submit the Reimbursement for Autism Expenses Form available at www.actcommunity.ca/resource/335/ or from the Autism Funding Branch.

Parents are responsible for employment-related expenses, such as Employment Insurance, WorkSafe BC and Federal and Provincial Income Taxes, where there is an employer/employee relationship. MCFD will not make any of these payments on behalf of parents. Parents must make payment themselves. MCFD will reimburse parents from their account for these expenses upon submission of the Reimbursement for Autism Expense Form.

Direct Payment Option (for Children age 12 and older)

Parents of children age 12 and older can opt for Direct Payment with the funds provided directly to the parent. Parents continue to choose eligible autism services for their child and are responsible for paying the service provider. The parent is responsible for collecting all related documentation including invoices, proof of payment, approved Justification for Equipment forms and/or approval letters. At the end of the funding cycle, parents must hire a qualified accounting professional (Certified General Accountant, Chartered Accountant, Certified Management Accountant or Chartered Professional Accountant) to complete an Accountant Confirmation Form; see AID Resource www.actcommunity.ca/resource/335/.

Understanding the Funding Agreement Before Signing

Understandably many parents, anxious to begin their child's treatment program, don't always take the time to read the funding agreement before they sign it. However, it is a legal document and parents must comply with its terms so it is important to read it carefully. A parent or guardian can ask the MCFD social worker to go through the Agreement point by point. Sometimes it is helpful to have the opportunity to read the Agreement in advance. You can request that your social worker or an ACT Information Officer send the Autism Agreement to you. It is available as an AID Resource: www.actcommunity.ca/resource/335/.

Autism Funding Agreements: Under Age 6/Ages 6–18

This is a basic agreement where the terms and conditions are the same for every parent who signs it. It outlines:

- The Province's obligations.
- The Parent's obligations.
- The term of the agreement with beginning and ending dates.
- The terms under which the agreement can end or be terminated as a result of certain circumstances.

The following is a summary of responsibilities, as outlined in the agreement.

The Province's Responsibilities

- To pay on behalf of the Parent for the benefit of the Child treatment funds in accordance with the amount as outlined in *A Parents' Handbook: Your Guide to Autism Programs*.
- The agreement doesn't specifically refer to direct payment for children age 12 and older, but in this case, the province provides the funds directly to the parent.

Parental Responsibilities

- To use the funds only for expenses for the child named in the agreement.
- To be fully and solely responsible for arranging, assessing and selecting the service provider from the Registry of Autism Service Providers and Behavior Interventionists. Inclusion on the RASP is not a requirement of service providers serving children six and over.
- To fulfill obligations as an employer under the Employment Standards Act, Worker's Compensation Act, Human Rights Code, Employment Insurance Act, Income Tax Act or Canada Pension Plan Act, or similar laws to which you may be subject.
- To be solely responsible for the amounts invoiced and paid to service providers when they are:
 - Over the maximum annual funding from the province.
 - Ineligible according to the province.
 - Received by the province more than 6 months after the date of service and/or the date when the equipment was purchased.

These websites provide information to clarify your relationship and responsibilities to your child's service providers:

Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services:

www.labour.gov.bc.ca/esb/facshts/employee.htm

Canada Revenue Agency: www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pub/tg/t4001/t4001-e.html

- To notify the Autism Funding Branch in writing within 30 days:
 - In case of a change of address.
 - When the child, for whatever reason, is no longer in your care or custody.
 - When there is any change in circumstance that might eliminate or reduce the need for funding.
- To not appoint anyone else to take over the agreement.
- To not commit money or claim to commit the Province to payment of any monies with the exception of eligible expenses as outlined in *A Parents' Handbook: Your Guide to Autism Programs*.
- To not hold the Province, its employees and agents legally responsible for any and all losses, claims, damages, actions, causes of actions, costs and expenses that may occur during or after this agreement.

For a summary of eligible and ineligible expenses, see AID Resource www.actcommunity.ca/resource/377/. Not all eligible expenses are listed. Families should complete a Justification for Equipment/Supplies form: www.actcommunity.ca/resource/335/ to ensure approval before purchasing questionable resources.

A Note of Caution

- Parents have reported to ACT that their autism funds have been used up by a service provider before the year was out and that the family had received no warning of this until they were notified by the Autism Funding Branch that their child's account was empty.
- To guard against such eventualities, it is helpful to focus on the reality that hiring service providers for your child is a business arrangement. The onus is on you as the parent to run the business in such a way that you protect the interests of your child. Initially, this is a difficult concept for many parents to grasp because they are focused on treatment, not finances, but it is essential to have a firm grasp of the practicalities. Ethical providers will appreciate parents who are aware of the issues and insure that they are paid in a timely manner. Unethical service provid-

ers will find it difficult to continue in business if all parents insist on the same high standards of accountability.

- The following are precautions that parents can take to guard their child’s funding:
 - Direct the Autism Funding Branch to only process invoices that are signed by the parent or guardian.
 - Only allow a service provider to bill without signature, if there is a contract in place that commits the service provider to:
 - › Invoicing your account within specific limits that you set together.
 - › Sending a copy to you of any invoice sent to the Autism Funding Branch, at the same time as the account is invoiced.

ACT also advises that you ask the Autism Funding Branch for details of your account on a regular basis. Remember, if you have given permission for funds to be withdrawn from your account, the Autism Funding Branch will not help you recover your funds. You may need to go to small claims court to do so and without a contract it will be difficult to prove that the account was debited incorrectly. Keep track of the service that your child receives from all providers so you can check the accuracy of accounting regularly. Chapter 5, “Contracting with Professionals on the RASP,” provides important information for parents on how to work and contract with service providers.

Complaints Resolution Process

MCFD is revising the complaint process to ensure that parents or guardians who experience difficulties with the conduct of service providers have a place to have their concerns reviewed and addressed. MCFD expects new guidelines to be available soon.

During this interim period, MCFD has asked ACT to be the first point of contact for complaints from parents and guardians.

For more information call the ACT office or see www.actcommunity.ca/rasp/information-for-families/rasp-complaint-process/.

Common Pitfalls that Delay Invoice Payment

ACT and the Autism Funding Branch have been working together to try to help parents and service providers avoid some common errors that slow down the rapid processing of invoices. Here are some of the pitfalls that the AFB has shared with us.

1. Insufficient funds set aside by “A Request to Pay” to cover invoice

The service provider has submitted an invoice but the “Request to Pay” that the AFB has on file does not cover the amount—the parent must complete a “Request to Amend” form if they agree with the charge and want to increase funds.

2. The Service Provider has increased their hourly rate but AFB has not received a “Request to Amend”

The AFB can only make a partial payment on an invoice at an increased hourly rate until the parent approves the increase by submitting a “Request to Amend” form.

3. Lack of clarity on who receives the payment – company or individual?

The invoice has both a company name and the name of an individual but does not specify whether the payment goes to an individual or to the company, or the invoice is submitted by a company but the “Request to Pay” form specifies an individual associated with the company.

4. Billing in advance

The AFB does not provide advance payment for services.

5. No hourly/daily rate on invoice

Hourly/daily rates are required on each invoice and this should match the “Request to Pay” as authorized by the parent.

6. Calculation errors

If the amounts do not add up properly, the AFB must clarify with the service provider, thus slowing down the issuing of payment.

7. Invoices sent in multiple times

Sending in duplicate invoices slows down the process of issuing payment.

8. Dates of service missing

All invoices must specify the date(s) that the service was provided.

9. Child’s name is missing

Every invoice has to specify the name of the child. Service providers should confirm with the family the exact name that they use with the Autism Funding Branch.

10. Service Provider submits invoices before authorization has been received by the AFB

In order for the service provider to receive payment, the Autism Funding Branch must first receive the authorization from the parent—the “Request to Pay” form.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF AUTISM FUNDING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Prior to 2002, children with ASD in B.C. received no direct funding from the provincial government to support their specialized treatment needs. There were limited supports available to the family in terms of behavior consultation, respite and childcare but no focus on treatment. Often supports were restricted to families whose children were diagnosed with Autistic Disorder and not other Autism Spectrum Disorders. Most had long waiting lists.

Since June 2002, the Province of British Columbia has provided limited direct funding to families. The Autism Funding Program was established following the litigation known as “The Auton Decision.” This decision was the result of a small group of families, organized by FEAT – Families for Early Autism Treatment, who jointly launched court proceedings against the provincial government. They were seeking the funding of Applied Behavior Analysis treatment programs for their children. The families asked the Court to rule that by denying funding for ABA, provincial authorities had violated certain statutes and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The families also sought an order requiring the province to pay for the cost of intervention for the children. In a ground breaking decision, the Supreme Court of British Columbia ruled in favour of the families.

Shortly after the initial court decision the Ministry of Children and Families began providing direct funding to parents and guardians of children with ASD under the age of 7 in the amount of up to \$20,000 annually. Sometime later the cut off date for \$20,000 annually was changed to a child’s 6th birthday.

In 2003, following another court case in which a group of families were successful, funding was extended to children and youth with ASD from their 6th birthday to their 19th birthday. Parents and guardians of children with ASD may receive funding up to \$6000 per year for autism intervention until the month of their child’s 19th birthday.

The B.C. Court decisions in favour of the ‘Auton Case’ families were overturned by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2004. However, the legacy of the important efforts made by these families remains as the Autism Funding Programs have been continued.

