

Frequently Asked Questions

Transition of Autism Information and Support Services from ACT-Autism Community Training to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)

What is the name of the new MCFD service and where will it be located?

- Effective July 1, 2017, autism information, support, and referral services will transition from ACT-Autism Community Training to MCFD's Policy and Provincial Services Division.
- The unit will be called ***Autism Information Services BC (AIS BC)***.
- AIS BC's mandate will include responsibility for provincial autism information, resources, referrals, and the Registry of Autism Service Providers (RASP).
- AIS BC will be located on the first floor of the Pacific Autism Family Network Good Life Fitness Family Autism Hub (PAFN) in Richmond.
- Families, service providers, and the public can access AIS BC services via a toll-free line, new family friendly website, and in-person at the PAFN Hub from 8:30-4:30 weekdays (excluding statutory holidays).

What is the contact information for Autism Information Services British Columbia?

Effective July 1, 2017:

Address: AIS BC c/o 3688 Cessna Drive, Richmond, British Columbia V7B 1C7

Toll Free Line: 1 844 878-4700

Email – general information: AutismInformation@gov.bc.ca

Email – RASP: RASP@gov.bc.ca

Website: <http://gov.bc.ca/autisminfo>

What services can I expect from Autism Information Services BC?

- *Autism Information Services BC* will be a provincial information centre for autism and related disorders and will focus on providing supports to families; service providers; and MCFD staff across the province.

- AIS BC will have Information Officers available via a toll-free number, email, or in-person to assist families, professionals, government workers, and related stakeholders to navigate the BC service system and to better understand the range of best practice treatment options for autism.

AIS BC services will be delivered within three streams:

1. Supports to Families

- Through a toll-free telephone line, in-person, in groups at live outreach events, or through the new website, AIS BC staff will assist the growing number of BC families affected by autism who need support in making informed decisions about treatment options for their children.
- In general, AIS BC will assist families by providing information on assessment and diagnosis; best practice treatment options; navigating the Autism Funding Program; finding and hiring professionals; identifying and accessing provincial and local-level community supports and services; and managing transitions across infancy, preschool, school-age and emerging adulthood.
- AIS BC will also be the home of the BC Autism Outreach Program which since 2011 has provided over 30 face-to-face training workshops on Autism Spectrum Disorders to families, caregivers, service providers, Delegated Aboriginal Agencies, and front-line MCFD staff in rural and remote communities across the province.

2. Supports for Service Providers

- AIS BC will continue to be a central resource for MCFD staff and related contracted employees such as CYSN Workers; Guardianship Workers; Infant Development Program staff; and Child Development Centre staff; so that they are better able to support the families they serve.
- AIS BC will also focus on promoting collaboration and coordination between autism-related service organizations and community support providers across BC, including continuing to work with ACT and the broader autism community, and building partnerships with new initiatives such as the Pacific Autism Family Network, and the network of inter- and cross-ministry services and supports across the province.

3. Management of the RASP

- AIS BC will manage and administer the RASP with continued support from the RASP Expert Advisory Panel. The existing online RASP search engine will be hosted on the AIS BC website so that families have continued access to a list of qualified professionals in the fields of Behaviour; Speech-Language Pathology; Occupational Therapy; and Physical Therapy.

- There are no changes to the application requirements and procedures. All on-line application forms have been updated to reflect the change in mailing and email addresses so that submissions are now directed to AIS BC.

Are there any changes expected to the Registry of Autism Service Providers (RASP)?

- No, the RASP will be managed and administered by AIS BC under the same MCFD policies and procedures adhered to by ACT.
- AIS BC will continue to seek advice from the RASP Expert Advisory Panel when needed.
- The RASP search engine will look and function like it does now and it will be hosted on the AIS BC website so that families have continued access to a list of qualified professionals in the fields of Behaviour; Speech-Language Pathology; Occupational Therapy; and Physical Therapy.
- There are no changes to the application requirements and procedures. All online application forms have been updated to reflect the change in mailing and email addresses so that submissions are now directed to AIS BC.

Why is MCFD bringing autism information and resources services and the management of the RASP in-house?

- MCFD recognizes that there are a growing number of families affected by autism who need support in making informed decisions regarding treatment options for their children.
 - Currently, B.C. provides funding to over 12,700 children and youth diagnosed with ASD and their families. That is more than 1,900 children under age six and more than 10,800 children and youth over age six are served, compared to only 600 children and youth in total in 2004.
- The decision was made to transition information, support, and referral services, including the management of the Registry of Autism Service Providers (RASP), in-house to ensure a sustainable, long-term approach for the delivery of high-quality supports to the growing number of families with children and youth diagnosed with ASD across the province.

Why does MCFD believe it can provide these services better than a not-for-profit contracted agency? Can the government explain why the service is being taken over by government instead of being maintained by a community-based organization? Is this to save money?

- The transition of service in-house is not a cost-cutting measure.

- Autism Information Services BC will take advantage of new partnerships, such as the Pacific Autism Family Network (PAFN), and established ministry initiatives, like the autism outreach program, as well as the network of inter- and cross-ministry services and supports across the province, to create a continuous progression of services with improved access to information, supports and resources.
- MCFD will also improve linkages with the autism funding program and CYSN social workers, and take advantage of internal expertise in training and support to ensure that families continue to receive un-biased, evidence-based resources and information that help them to make informed decisions for their child.

There may be a risk that families will no longer reach out for information, resources and support if these services are provided by the ministry. How will MCFD address this concern?

- Autism Information Services BC will be housed in the Pacific Autism Family Network (PAFN) Hub. It will not be connected or physically associated with typical MCFD offices including Child Welfare.
- MCFD has hired the majority of current ACT employees to ensure that families have continued access to the individuals with whom they have developed trusting relationships.
- MCFD is developing a new website for the program. The site will launch July 1 and will be hosted outside of the government system to ensure that the look is family friendly, approachable, reliable, and trustworthy.
- MCFD remains committed to helping families access all supports and services, including those provide by AIS BC, in a family-centered, unbiased manner.

What can families expect during the transition?

- No disruption of information and support services or access to the Registry of Autism Service providers (RASP) is expected. Payments and services through the Autism Funding program are unaffected by this change.
- Over the past five months since the decision to transition services in-house, MCFD has actively engaged ACT in the transfer of services. Work includes:
 - hiring the majority of ACT staff in order to maintain their expertise;
 - ensuring that the Registry of Autism Service Providers (RASP) is seamlessly embedded into government webpages so that there is no interruption to access by families or service providers; and

- ensuring that families have continuous access to information officers and all on-line information and resources that they are accustomed to accessing through ACT.

How will this move impact the autism community?

- The ministry will also continue to work with ACT in the future and with the broader autism community to ensure effective and collaborative relationships with service organizations so that families are provided with the right information at the right time.

What services will ACT-Autism Community Training continue to offer after July 1, 2017?

- MCFD greatly appreciates the high level of commitment, support and expertise that ACT has provided to families over the past 10 years.
- ACT will continue to focus on training opportunities for families and service providers across BC.

ACT will continue to provide training and information resources including:

- [Live events](#) - available both in-person and via web streaming; MCFD-funded bursaries available.
- [Autism Videos @ ACT](#) – nearly 30 free online video.
- [Autism Information Database](#) –over 1,000 vetted information resources related to ASD.
- [ACT's Special Needs Events Listing](#) – information on what BC organizations are doing.
- For more information, please visit ACT's website at <http://www.actcommunity.ca/>

The following are answers to questions posted on the ACT-Autism Community Training Website

Can the government explain why families and professionals were not consulted about whether they want this service to be provided by government, rather than a community-based provider?

- The decision was made to transition information, support, and referral services, including the management of the Registry of Autism Service providers (RASP), in-house to ensure a sustainable, long-term approach for the delivery of high-quality supports to the growing number of families with children and youth diagnosed with ASD across the province.
- The transition of service in-house is not a cost-cutting measure.
- The ministry will take advantage of new partnerships, such as the Pacific Autism Family Network (PAFN), and established ministry initiatives, like the autism outreach program, as well as the network of inter- and cross-ministry services and supports across the province, to create a continuous progression of services and seamless access to information, supports and resources.

Will the service be arms' length from government; can callers expect unbiased support even if they have complaints about government services, policies or employees?

- Yes, MCFD has an extensive and unbiased complaints process to ensure that the interests of families seeking or accessing services are at the forefront.

What commitments will the B.C. government make to ensuring that this service remains arms' length from child protection service and the Autism Funding Branch so that families can be assured of confidentiality?

- Client confidentiality is protected under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*.
- MCFD will continue to adhere to all provision of the relevant privacy legislation.

If a parent makes a complaint about a government service, including the Autism Funding Branch, will this put their autism funding in jeopardy?

- No, AIS BC is an information center where families and services providers are able to access information about autism and related disorders based on their individual needs. If parents want to make a complaint about MCFD staff or about a RASP provider, these complaints are taken seriously and will be addressed as per MCFD's existing complaints policy and process. A family's autism funding will not be affected if they make a complaint.

If a parent calls this new service and discloses that they have inadvertently done something that transgresses Autism Funding Branch policy, will they be penalized? (ACT's services are confidential).

- All families accessing the autism funding program must sign a funding agreement, which outlines their duties and responsibilities as the recipients of ministry funding.
- As a provincial information center, AIS BC will help educate and support families and service providers to understand and abide by the ministry's eligibility and funding guidelines.
- If a family discloses an inadvertent error, they will be requested to contact the Autism Funding Program to discuss the circumstances and process to rectify the error.

Will the new service respond to calls from school personnel, service providers and medical specialists asking for help to support families? (ACT responds to all callers.)

- Yes, AIS BC is an information center available to provide information and support to anyone who contacts the ministry.

Will the new service answer questions from/about adults with autism? (Currently some 12% of ACT's contacts are from adults or parents of adults).

- Yes, AIS BC is an information center that will provide support and referrals to anyone looking for information about ASD across the lifespan.

Will the new service be prepared to help families advocate when they feel they are being treated unfairly by MCFD child protection services; a school district; the forensic psychiatric system; a landlord or a private service provider?

- Yes, AIS BC will provide individualized information and support as required by those who need assistance to support people with ASD.
- Families will also be made aware of additional advocacy and support services offered through the Office of the Representative of Children and Youth and the Office of the Ombudsperson.

Will this new service implement a rigorous complaints process to protect families from being taken advantage of by unscrupulous professionals on the Registry of Autism Service Providers?

- MCFD has a rigorous complaints process and is developing a specific complaints process for the RASP that will protect families against professionals who are not acting in an ethical manner.

Will this new service commit to giving all RASP Professionals the opportunity to provide profiles of their work? (Parents and professionals support this but ACT has not had funding to expand this service).

- The ministry will review the feasibility of this suggestion.

- Regardless, the online RASP search engine will continue to provide profiles of Behavior Consultants that allow parents to learn more about their individual qualifications and services.

Where will this new office be located – will it be possible to drop-in?

- AIS BC will be located on the first floor of the Pacific Autism Family Network Good Life Fitness Family Autism (PAFN) Hub at 3688 Cessna Drive, Richmond, BC.
- Hours of operation will be 8:30am – 4:30pm weekdays (excluding statutory holidays)
- Information Officers will be available via a toll free number, email, or in-person (drop-in or by appointment) during regular business hours.

Will there be community outreach with information tables at public events?

- Yes, AIS BC will endeavour to be a full participant in the broader autism community, which includes engaging and participating a live training or public events.

Given the difficulties with navigating the MCFD website, how will MCFD ensure that families will have the online access they need?

- A new family friendly site is under development. The intent is to build new webpages that maintain the look and feel that families and service providers have come to expect from ACT.

How is this service going to be different from MCFD's current service delivery system which families complain is unresponsive to their concerns?

- AIS BC will endeavour to provide the same services that ACT has provided on behalf of MCFD for the last decade.
- AIS BC is a new program within MCFD that is primarily an information and support service. It will not duplicate existing services and will augment the assistance available to individuals with ASD and their families so they can receive the right supports at the right time.

ACT's staff depends on the Autism Information Database search tool for access to over 2,000 resources. Will the new service continue providing this resource? (ACT will fundraise to continue supporting the information resources but will not have the staff to maintain over 1,000 community resources).

- AIS BC will have internal information resources available to ministry staff to ensure they are properly trained and supported to assist families.
- AIS BC staff will also have access to training opportunities and resources provided by ACT, PAFN, and other community stakeholders.