

How Families Can Advocate for Investment in the Future of BC's Neurodiverse & Disabled Children

The Concern

ACT has received hundreds of worried messages from distraught families following the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) announcement ending individualized funding, effective 2025. This will affect the Autism Funding Programs and school-age extended therapy benefits.

Families across disabilities are highly critical of MCFD's new Framework for Children and Youth with Support Needs (CYSN) policy. Despite three years of work – it is confusingly vague. The issues are complex and there are many perspectives, but it is clear British Columbia's child serving system desperately needs an overhaul and a significant infusion of funding, protected by the agreement of all parties against future government cuts. However, if this is going to be a responsive system, it can't be done by government imposing a monolithic model. Individualized funding is the best fit for many families but a range of programs to fit the diversity of children and families is what is required in our geographically challenging environment.

Constructive Advocacy

It is time to get organized, not time to despair! Just because a government ministry announces a change, it doesn't mean it will happen. MCFD's announcement has galvanized families and organizations across disabilities to raise their voices together. United we have a good chance of convincing all political parties in British Columbia to listen to citizens affected by disabilities – especially struggling parents of young children whose access to diagnosis, therapy and education has been further delayed by the pandemic. This is happening against a background of declining service levels over the last decade which has left families unable to access basic intervention services for their children, unless they have the means to pay privately.

Advocacy Tips on What You Can Do

There are many ways to advocate constructively, which is our right and our duty as citizens of a democracy. We can write letters to politicians and to the media; we can hold demonstrations; sign petitions; ask for meetings with our Members of BC's Legislative Assembly. Remember to remain polite, but firm! We can talk to our friends and family, those people who work with our children, and ask for their support. Ask for help with letter writing etc. or to walk with you at a rally or sign a petition. People often want to help but are not sure how. To find out about the latest petitions and rallies – go to [ACT's Facebook Page](#) or [Community Initiatives](#).

Here is who you can contact with your letters of concern:

- Mitzi Dean, the Minister for MCFD MCF.Minister@gov.bc.ca.
- Your Member of the Legislature (MLA). Here is how to find your MLA: www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members. You can also ask for a meeting with your MLA. Bring your child!
- The Premier, John Horgan premier@gov.bc.ca.
- Adrian Dix, the Minister for Health HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca about the 2,000 children waiting for a diagnosis with the BC Autism Assessment Network.
- Jennifer Whiteside, the Minister for Education, EDUC.Minister@gov.bc.ca if you are concerned at the lack of educational opportunities for disabled children.
- ACT would appreciate being copied on emails. info@actcommunity.ca.

Key Concerns Raised by Families and Community Organizations

- The disruption to children and families if existing, well-functioning teams are dismantled.
- The loss of parental choice in service providers. Will there be any options if those at your hub are not a good fit?
- If your child and family receive no support currently, or very limited support, describe your situation and what needs to change. Are you still waiting for a diagnosis? Does your child have a condition that is not supported currently?
- The lack of commitment to guaranteed levels of funding to support these new hubs which are expected to provide services to at least a third more children. Will the waiting lists for diagnosis be reassigned to the hubs? Or will they also be the victims of government cuts as has happened frequently over the last 20 years.
- What is the training of the assessors based at these hubs – will they have specialized knowledge of specific disabilities? Currently Child Development Centres (CDCs) are ‘needs-based’ and are supposed to serve all children with support needs, but many are turned away, put on waiting lists or provided only minimal therapy. Many children never get to the top of the waiting list even though they are assessed as needing service.
- MCFD has announced specific assessment tools which are not scientifically valid to be used to determine need at these proposed hubs. Clinicians are concerned these tools will not detect the needs of the range of children who will come to the hubs as that is not what they were designed to do. Will the hubs become the ‘gate-keepers’ for services?
- A clear diagnosis is crucial for the long-term interests of the child. When will the Ministry of Health bring an end to the current two year waiting lists for diagnosis for children across disabilities?

Stay Informed

ACT will be continually updating our [New MCFD Framework for Children with Support Needs](#) page which has links to all relevant MCFD announcements and resource pages, media reports and statements from disability organizations. You may want to check on the latest information before writing your letters. [Join ACT's confidential email list](#) and [follow ACT on Facebook](#) so that we can reach you with new information. Parents can also post their concerns on [ACT's Facebook](#) page.

Updates from MCFD

[See announcements and resources from MCFD on the new framework.](#)