



April 7, 2021

VIA EMAIL
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Dear Members of the First Nations Summit:

Thank you for your letter of March 17, 2021, expressing support for the Canada-BC Housing Benefit that was announced on March 8, 2021, by the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and lead Minister for the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, the National Housing Strategy and Service Canada. The Honourable David Eby, Attorney General and Minister responsible for Housing, was not included in your letter, but please be assured that I will share your correspondence with him.

This new housing benefit announced by Ministers Hussen and Eby provides financial assistance to marginalized groups with low incomes to help with their monthly rent payments, and I was very pleased that the program will include youth leaving care and transitioning to independence.

When this program begins operation in the 2021-22 fiscal year, youth transitioning to independence who meet the eligibility criteria will be able to apply for the housing benefit. The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), the Ministry responsible for Housing, and BC Housing are working together to develop an application process that is efficient and accessible to youth. I am aware that some of the eligibility criteria, such as having been employed within the past year, will exclude some young adults from government care. These parameters are determined by the federal government and thus I would recommend directing those questions to the federal level.

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As a result of early collaborative work with BC Housing to develop a provincial response to youth housing prior to the start of the new Canada-BC Housing Benefit, there was an opportunity to disburse a limited number of housing benefits to young adults transitioning to independence from government care. These benefits had become available due to unspent funds from the 2020-21 fiscal year. In order to prevent the opportunity from lapsing, these benefits needed to be allocated quickly – hence the application deadline of March 17, 2021, following the announcement of the opportunity on March 9, 2021. However, despite these constraints, every effort was made to disseminate information about the time and number-limited benefits fairly and effectively, including two town hall information sessions hosted by the Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks on the day of the announcement. I am pleased to let you know that over 300 housing benefits were able to be allocated to former youth from care as a result of this opportunity, which is one third more than was anticipated.

Thank you for sharing with me the resolutions passed at the BC Assembly of First Nations, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the First Nations Summit for the development of an Indigenous youth housing strategy. The Canada-BC Housing Benefit will be included in the collaborative work that is currently underway between MCFD, the Minister responsible for Housing, and BC Housing to develop a broader youth and young adult housing strategy, which will prioritize youth transitioning to independence and the needs of Indigenous youth.

Thank you also for your ongoing partnership to address the needs of Indigenous youth transitioning to independence. We value the opportunity to work collaboratively with the First Nations Leadership Council to ensure that youth and young adults have safe, secure and sustainable housing.

Sincerely,



Mitzi Dean
Minister of Children and Family Development

pc: Honourable Ahmed Hussen
Honourable David Eby