



Policy Brief: Fostering Change

October 23, 2019

*What happens when you age out? Who's there for you, and what do you need?
Youth from care need to have the same gradual and extended transition
to adulthood that most young people enjoy.*



firstcall BC CHILD AND YOUTH
ADVOCACY COALITION

Who We Are

We're a team of organizers dedicated to challenging systemic injustice for youth in and from government care. Together, we develop our activism skills and use them to advocate for needed policy changes.

We're all former youth in care, and passionate about changing systems and building community together. We're supported by the Fostering Change Campaign, hosted by First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition.

Our Goal

- **Adequate and reliable** financial support by:
 - removing policy barriers including the age cap and minimum in-care time period for the Agreements with Young Adults program; and
 - guaranteeing equitable access to start-up costs to help us buy the things we need to live independently when we age out of care.

Policy solutions that are:

- **Comprehensive:** Support that lifts us into equity with our peers, including financial support based on actual living costs in our communities, mental health and life skills resources, and supportive people in our lives.
- **Universal:** All youth who age out of government care at 19 have access, regardless of legal status or readiness, to attend post-secondary. Additionally, this support must be available to any youth who has spent time in care and does not have access to support at 19.

The Public Agrees
79% of survey
respondents support the
Finance Committee's
recommendation to
ensure comprehensive
support for those leaving
foster care at age 19.

Source: Insights West Omnibus Poll
September 25, 2019

Background

When Premier Horgan responded to the First Call and Fostering Change policy memorandum of October 2017, he stated, "MCFD is re-imagining the AYA program with the goal of offering supports to all youth aging out of care who need it, and not just a few."

Shortly after this commitment from the Premier, in May of 2018, government accepted all of the recommendations in the *BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel: Review of MCFD-Involved Youth Transitioning to Independence January 1, 2011 – December 31, 2016*.

- Recommendation #1: Expand Agreements with Young Adults (AYAs) to Address Self-identified Transition Needs

By October 2019, the MCFD will amend the qualifying criteria for AYAs so that all young people transitioning from care or Youth Agreements are universally eligible for the program. Services and financial support provided will address unique circumstances and transition needs of the young person.

➤ Recommendation #2: Ensure Collaboration to Support Effective Planning and Service Provision

By December 2019 the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions will collaborate with MCFD, Health and First Nations Health Authority to ensure access to youth mental health and addictions services for youth transitioning from care or on Youth Agreements.

The problem

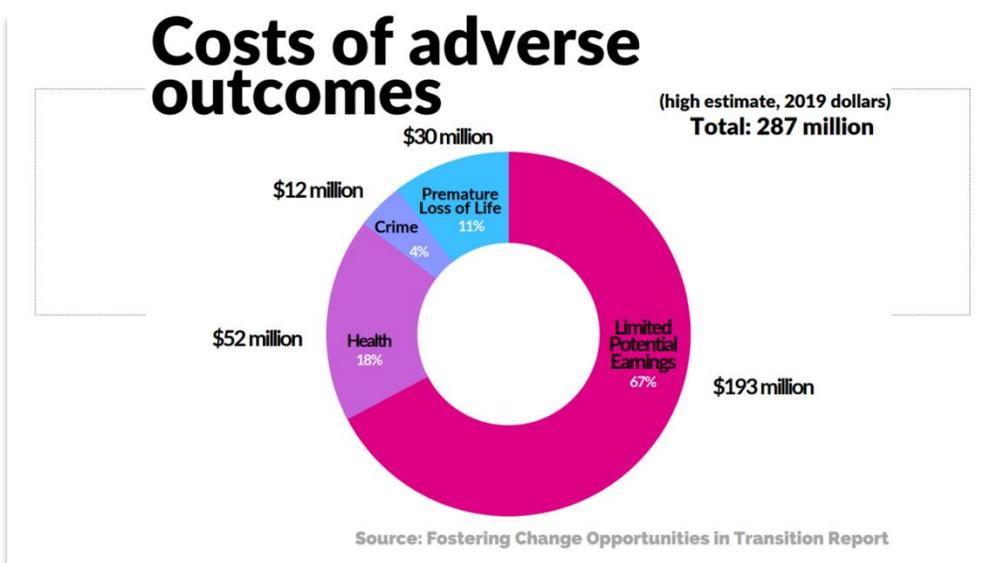
Youth are aging out of care without support!

When youth age out of care at 19, the government services and supports they rely on in place of a family are simultaneously cut off. Research shows:

- up to 57% of homeless youth in BC communities were formerly in care
- 45% of youth from care aged out without a high school credential (2016/2017)
- 65% of BC youth in care are Indigenous, while they make up only about 10% of under 19 years olds.
- educational, economic, social, and wellness outcomes for many youth aging out of care are poor compared to most young people.

What we know

- Youth from care need specific programs and services that will help us thrive!
- Some program changes have been made, but they primarily serve only the most successful youth.
- The provincial government has served youth through funding piecemeal programs and one-time-only grants.
- The cost of doing nothing is estimated at over \$250M per year!



The Agreements with Young Adults Program:

This program supports youth who have aged out from a Youth Agreement (YAG) or Continuing Custody Order (CCO) for attending education, training or life skills programs or a rehabilitation program. It can provide up to \$1,250 per month and is needs-based, which means that the program funds budget shortfalls instead of ambitiously supporting youth goals.

The good: Agreements with Young Adults (AYAs) support any youth who has aged out from care under the two legal statuses for 48 months, regardless of whether they take time away from school. They can attend many different programs and still get funds. AYAs are a clear step forward for some youth.

The bad: Youth must prove their need every month, and many of them don't receive the full \$1,250 despite needing it. Youth can access a number of programs, but it means they need to fill out lots of paperwork and have different workers for each program. Life skills programs are not equally available throughout the province.

The Path to Solutions

✓ requires legislative and regulatory change

Right now, the Agreements with Young Adults program is part of the Child and Family Community Services Act (CFCSA). The Act needs to be changed to ensure universal and comprehensive benefits are guaranteed to youth from care after turning 19.

Can we count on your support for legislative change?

✓ requires a whole government approach

Barriers to fairness for youth in and aging out of care exist across government. Here are a few examples:

- **Public transit fees** are unaffordable for many youth and pose a barrier to education, healthcare and maintaining social connections.
- **Public transit fines** that go unpaid due to financial hardship prevent youth from obtaining a driver's license and can burden youth with poor credit scores that make it hard to access banking services and credit.
- **Public housing** remains high-barrier with large waitlists and youth from care end up without support to find shelter.
- **Person with Disabilities Benefits** are used for 47% of youth leaving care, but do not come with specifically targeted services for those with experience in the government care system.
- **Tuition Waivers** remain limited to youth who've spent at least two years in care and who are under 27.
- **Mental Health supports** are difficult to find and afford for youth from care who are dealing with past trauma and other mental health challenges.
- **Poverty Reduction** lives with many ministries – shouldn't youth from care?

Can we count on your support to reduce barriers for youth in and from care?