
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Children and Family Development

CHANGES TO AUTISM PROGRAMS INCREASE FUNDING AND EQUITY

VICTORIA – The Minister of Children and Family Development Mary Polak announced changes today to services for children and youth diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families that are directed at equalizing access and maintaining and improving service levels.

“These changes are a reflection of government’s priority to provide – and protect – critical supports for vulnerable children and their families, including children and youth with special needs,” said Polak.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development’s budget for autism intervention and funding programs is more than 10 times the 2001 budget of \$4.1 million, totalling more than \$46 million in 2009-10, including a \$1.6-million increase this year. As a result of these budget increases, more than 6,000 children and youth diagnosed with ASD and their families are served now, compared to only a few hundred prior to 2000.

Despite significant investments, we are still faced with increased demand that necessitates revision to current programs and services to ensure they are delivered in the most effective way possible.

Service changes include:

- Effective April 1, 2010, funding will be increased for children diagnosed with autism who are under six years of age – from \$20,000 to \$22,000 per year.
- Autism funding for children and youth aged 6-18 remains the same at \$6,000 per year, which is in addition to the \$16,000 special education funding that school districts receive for each child.
- Effective October, 2009, the ministry will begin moving families from Direct Funding to Invoice Payment in the Autism Funding Programs in order to improve accountability and increase efficiency.
 - Direct Funding: Families manage their child’s funds and pay service providers.
 - Invoice Payment: Families choose the service but the ministry manages the child’s funds and pays service providers when it receives an invoice.

Effective January 31, 2010, the ministry will discontinue funding the province’s Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI) programs that currently serve 70 children in seven communities at a cost of almost \$5 million annually.

Approximately \$1 million will be redirected toward the creation of a new provincial outreach program to improve access to professional services, particularly in rural communities. Savings will also be re-directed to fund the increase in 'Autism Funding: Under 6' to more than 800 families.

“In these challenging economic times, we have given priority to our most needy children and continue to provide immediate individual funding as soon as a child is diagnosed with ASD,” said Polak.

For more information, families receiving autism funding may call the Autism Funding Unit at MCFD 250 387-3530 in Victoria or toll-free at 1 877 777-3530.

A factsheet follows.

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Contact: Christine Ash
Media Relations Manager
Ministry of Children and Family Development
250 356-1639
250 812-3616

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FACTSHEET

September 2009

Ministry of Children and Family Development

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

B.C. is committed to an integrated, co-ordinated approach in the provision of services and supports for children and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families.

KEY FACTS

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition that impacts normal brain development, and affects social relationships, communication, interests and behaviour.
- ASD occurs in approximately one in every 150 births, may appear during the first three years of life, and has been found throughout the world in families of all ethnic and social backgrounds. ASD is four to five times more common in boys than girls.
- Although there is no cure for ASD, there are highly effective treatment and intervention methods available that can help individuals and their families address the characteristics of this disorder.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

- B.C. continues to improve assessment, diagnosis, intervention and support services for children with ASD and their families through effective cross-ministry planning.
- Today, more than 6,000 children and youth diagnosed with ASD – more than 900 children under age six and over 5,000 children and youth aged six through 18 – and their families are served compared to only a few hundred prior to 2000.
- Autism intervention and Family Support Services are funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and delivered in partnership with Community Living British Columbia (CLBC). Services currently delivered by CLBC will be transferred back to MCFD on Oct. 31, 2009.
- The MCFD budget for autism intervention and funding programs is more than TEN times the 2001 budget of \$4.1 million, totaling more than \$46 million in 2009-10.
- Funding for diagnostic and assessment services, funded by the Ministry of Health Services (MoHS) and delivered through health authorities, has increased from \$100,000 in 2001-02 to \$3.4 million in 2008-09.
- School districts receive \$16,000 in supplemental funding, in addition to the basic per pupil funding, for each student with ASD to provide in-school interventions and services. In 2006, the Ministry of Education funding formula was expanded to all children and youth with a diagnosis on the autism spectrum.
- Five years ago, children were waiting a year and a half just to get a diagnosis – today, that wait has been cut to a provincial average of six to seven months. Once a child or youth is diagnosed, there are no waitlists for autism intervention funding.

- Since 2001, MCFD has developed three approaches to autism intervention for children and youth with ASD and their families.
 - **Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI)** – began in 2001. Contracted services currently provide intensive one-to-one therapy for approximately 70 children under age six with ASD. Services are available in seven communities – Greater Victoria, Surrey, Delta, Langley, Kelowna, Penticton and Kamloops.
 - **Autism Funding: Under Age 6** – began in 2002. Families can receive funding of up to \$20,000 per year to assist with the cost of purchasing autism intervention services (based on best practices) to promote their child’s communication, social-emotional, pre-academic and functional life-skills development.
 - **Autism Funding: Ages 6–18** – began in 2003. Families of school-aged children can receive funding of up to \$6,000 per year to assist with the cost of purchasing out-of-school autism intervention promote their child’s communication, social-emotional, academic and functional life skills.
- Children and youth diagnosed with ASD and their families are also eligible for a variety of other services and supports through MCFD and Community Living British Columbia including Respite, Family Supports, Infant Development and Supported Child Development. Those services currently delivered by CLBC will be transferred back to MCFD in 2009-10.
- Government continues to support research to help inform the development, provision and effectiveness of services for children and youth with ASD. In fact:
 - The Province has provided \$1 million to support development of a program to promote intervention research and provide graduate-level training to increase service capacity in B.C.
 - B.C. has also invested \$1.275 million in a long-term national study into effective interventions for children with ASD.
 - B.C. has established partnerships with post-secondary institutions, such as Douglas College, to increase the number and quality of trained autism interventionists.
 - In order to assist families in making informed choices, ongoing research is being done to ensure services are current, grounded in evidence-based-practice, and effective for children with ASD and their families.

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