



**Policy Brief: Fostering Change
Policy Solutions Day
October 25, 2021**

Background

In British Columbia, the Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) Program is the only support program serving youth once they have turned 19 and aged out of government care. The program supports both youth who have aged out of care from a Youth Agreement (YAG) or Continuing Custody Order (CCO). It is intended to support youth who are attending an educational, training, or life skills program, or a rehabilitation program. The AYA Program provides a maximum of \$1,250 per month which falls short of the cost of living and leaves youth without necessities, including housing, and community and cultural support.

What We Know

- In British Columbia in 2019/20, 763 youth aged out of government care and were eligible for a benefit payment from the Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) program¹. Only 40% of eligible youth accessed at least one AYA payment in that year.
- The National Youth Homelessness Survey, conducted in Canada in 2016, found that “57.8 per cent of homeless youth reported involvement with the child welfare system at some point in their lives.”²
- 65% of BC youth in care are Indigenous, yet they make up only 10% of the under 19-year-olds in the general population.³
- The educational, economic, social, and health outcomes for many youth aging out of care are drastically lower when compared to their peers who are not in care.
- Premier Horgan made a commitment in 2018 promising that “MCFD is re-imagining the AYA program with the goal of offering support to all youth aging out of care who need it, not just a few.”⁴
- Research shows that 79% of British Columbians are in support of more comprehensive supports for youth when they age out of care at 19.⁵
- Youth in care often fear their 19th birthday.

¹ Representative for Children and Youth, A Parent’s Duty p. 69, https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/RCY-A-Parents-Duty_FINAL.pdf, 2020

² Stephen Gaetz, Bill O’Grady, Sean Kidd, and Kaitlin Schwan, Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey (Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press), <https://homelesshub.ca/YouthWithoutHome>, 2016

³ Ibid

⁴ Fostering Change post, Letter from Premier Horgan, https://www.fosteringchange.ca/reply_from_the_premier, April 2018

⁵ First Call Public Opinion Survey, 2019

Recommendations for Policy Solutions

We know that pandemic related, temporary changes to programs and policy including The Life Skills Programming and Temporary Housing Agreement had positive effects, but they are only part of the solution. Youth who are aging out of government care need policies that provide support that is stable, inclusive, and equitable.

- **Government must ensure that no youth leaves government care without comprehensive support** including
 - adequate housing;
 - sufficient financial assistance; and
 - accessible community and cultural supports.
- Youth who are aging out of care should be automatically enrolled into support programs regardless of the time spent in care or their care status.
- Government should take a readiness-based, not age-based, approach to youth in care and ensure no youth abruptly loses support when they turn 19.

About Us

Over 130 youth strong, we refer to ourselves as the Fostering Change Community Organizers. We are former youth with lived experience in the child welfare system and we have all been in foster care. We advocate for policy change that will ensure no youth leaves care without the benefit of supports, youth will avoid the “superhighway to homelessness”, and every youth will have the opportunity to thrive. Good government policy will change the landscape for youth who are transitioning from care into adulthood for the better.

We believe every youth deserves to look forward to their 19th birthday.

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