

# 5 MCFD-FUNDED SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH ASD

*Once a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has received a diagnosis, parents start to focus on finding treatment and other supports for their child and their family. This involves not only exploring the treatment options but also finding out how they can be funded. A primary role of ACT – Autism Community Training is to act as an information resource for families and the community professionals who support them. This manual is only one source of information. ACT’s team of Information Officers remains available to give families individualized support and information.*

*Clair Schuman, ACT–Autism Community Training’s former Executive Director, is principal author of this section. Clair has extensive experience in working with families who have children with ASD and has worked closely with ACT’s team of Information Officers. Many of the insights provided in this section have been gained in the process of supporting families from across B.C. Clair also has the invaluable experience of parenting her own son with ASD who is now a young adult.*

*This chapter focuses on services funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) either directly or through other agencies.*

*ACT’s Information Officers are available to help families and those who support them by telephone and email wherever they live in B.C. If you have questions about any of the following information, contact ACT at [info@actcommunity.net](mailto:info@actcommunity.net) or toll-free at 1-866-939-5188 or 604-205-5467 for Metro Vancouver.*

To provide us with new information and/or corrections to include in manual updates, e-mail [manual@actcommunity.net](mailto:manual@actcommunity.net).

The information in this section has been organized as follows, although there is overlap between the sections:

- The Autism Funding Program
  - Types of Autism Programs
    - › Autism Funding: Under Age 6
    - › Autism Funding: Ages 6–18
  - Applying for the Autism Funding Program
    - › For those with a B.C. Autism Assessment Network Diagnosis
    - › For those with a private B.C. diagnosis
    - › For those with an out-of-province/out-of-country diagnosis
    - › For those who have a diagnosis dated prior to April 1, 2004
  - The Invoice Payment Process
  - Understanding the Funding Agreement Before Signing
    - › Autism Funding: Under Age 6
    - › Autism Funding: Ages 6–18
  - A Brief History of Autism Funding in B.C.
- MCFD-Funded Programs Available for All Children with Special Needs
  - Behavioral Support.
  - Child and Youth Care Workers.
  - Professional Support Services.
  - Parent Support.
  - Respite.
  - Homemaker/Home Support Worker.
  - Residential Services for Children in Care.
  - Infant Development Program.
  - Aboriginal Infant Development Program.
  - Early Intervention Therapies Program.
  - School-Aged Therapies Program.
  - Supported Child Development Programs.
  - At Home Program.
  - Child Care Subsidy.
  - Transition Planning to Adulthood.

ACT has developed a webpage that lists community resources from throughout B.C. See [www.actcommunity.net/AI/Resources/Agencies.htm](http://www.actcommunity.net/AI/Resources/Agencies.htm) or call an ACT Information Officer for help.

This chapter should be read along with Chapter 3, “Developing an Autism Treatment Team for Your Child.”

## THE AUTISM FUNDING PROGRAM

In British Columbia, the provincial government, through the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), has provided autism intervention funding to parents and guardians since 2002. While several other Canadian provinces provide autism treatment programs, parents in B.C. have considerably more responsibility for directing their child's treatment than in other jurisdictions.

It can be overwhelming to grapple with setting up a treatment program while still dealing with the impact of a diagnosis of autism. ACT is committed to providing impartial information to parents making these decisions. In addition to the information in Chapter 3, ACT has a useful "New Diagnosis Parent Package" that can be mailed to you if you did not receive it from your diagnostician. ACT Information Officers can advise parents on the process and can provide support in English, Tagalog and Chinese.

An important source of information from MCFD is *A Parent's Handbook: Your Guide to Autism Programs*. This booklet and other helpful information is available on-line at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/publications.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/publications.htm). This information can also be sent to you by ACT if it is not readily accessible at your local MCFD office.

### Types of Autism Programs and How to Access Them

MCFD provides two types of Autism Programs for children who qualify (see Chapter 1 for diagnostic requirements):

- Autism Funding: Under Age 6.
- Autism Funding: Ages 6-18.

#### Autism Funding: Under Age Six

This program is designed to provide money, up to \$22,000 per year as of April 2010, for families to purchase specific autism treatment services. The focus of intervention must be on the child's communication, social-emotional, pre-academic and functional life skills. The Government of B.C. recognizes that \$22,000 per year may represent only a portion of the costs of a full treatment program for a child with autism. Parents are expected to provide any additional funding required.



Although parents may feel that they are able to justify certain expenditures because of their child's needs, Autism Funding is intended to be focused on intervention to improve the child's functioning and future outcomes rather than on the maintenance of the child as he or she is today. This means that there are many expenses that are not eligible under the Autism Funding Program. There may be other sources of funds to cover some of these expenses through MCFD. There is more information on this below. Some expenses are considered to be the same as those that a parent would spend on a child if he or she didn't have autism and therefore are not eligible.

A parent or guardian is required to obtain the services of a qualified behavior consultant to develop a behavioral plan of intervention (BPI). This plan is to be individualized and based on the child's unique strengths and challenges.

For more details of the BPI, see Chapter 3 of this manual, "Developing an Autism Treatment Team for Your Child."

For all children with ASD in B.C. under six, when MCFD Autism Funding is used, the behavior consultant and other professionals must be selected from the Registry of Autism Service Providers (RASP). More information about choosing RASP professionals can be found in Chapter 3, "Developing an Autism Treatment Team for Your Child." The RASP Listing can be accessed on ACT's website at [www.actcommunity.net/RASP/Parents/](http://www.actcommunity.net/RASP/Parents/).

ACT strongly advises parents to interview several behavioral consultants before making a final decision—don't rely on recommendations from others alone or allow yourself to be rushed into a decision by an over-enthusiastic service provider. It is especially important for parents to review alternative providers if they have received a private diagnosis from an agency that also provides treatment.

### Autism Funding: Ages 6–18

Like the program for children under age six, this program is designed to provide funding, up to \$6,000 per year, for families to purchase autism intervention services. Unlike the under 6 program, this program has more flexibility regarding intervention choices and allowable expenses. The focus of intervention for this age group is to promote the child's communication, social-emotional, academic and functional life skills development.

This program requires that parents or guardians ensure that the funds expended are spent outside of the child's school/educational program. Funding a child's school program is considered the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the school district or the independent school. See MCFD's *A Parent's Handbook: Your Guide to Autism Programs* for the specific differences between allowable expenses for the two autism funding programs.

## Applying for the Autism Funding Program

### Eligibility

An application to the Autism Funding Program may be made when:

- A child under six has received a diagnosis and assessment of ASD, using the required testing instruments, from a multidisciplinary team;
- A child six and over has received a diagnosis from an individual practitioner.

See Chapter 1, “The Diagnostic Process in British Columbia,” for details of the diagnostic process.

### Providing the Correct Documentation

A child is eligible for funding from the first day of the month that MCFD receives all required documents, so it is vital to ensure that the right documents have been sent and that they have been received by MCFD.

The parent or guardian may fax them to the social worker so that they can be reviewed before a meeting to avoid delays and to maximize the time period that the child is eligible for funding.

To find the MCFD office that serves your community see [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec\\_needs/pdf/CYSN%20Transfer%20Letter.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/pdf/CYSN%20Transfer%20Letter.pdf). If you are having difficulty locating your local office, contact ACT.

It is best for the parent to telephone the MCFD office to confirm that the documents have been received. Take a note of the date and the name of the person who has confirmed receipt.

The following documents are required by the MCFD social worker to complete the application:

- The BCAAN Clinical Outcomes form or a Non-BCAAN (Private) Diagnosis of ASD form, showing a diagnosis of ASD.
- Proof of the child’s age (such as a birth certificate).
- The child’s BC Care Card.

MCFD’s “Application for Autism Funding” can be found at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/forms.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/forms.htm) or can be requested from your local MCFD office or from ACT.

### Steps for the Parent to Take to Initiate Funding

1. As soon as possible after diagnosis contact your local MCFD office and initiate the application process. You will be asked a series of questions. Make a note of the date and time you called along with the name of the person(s) you spoke with.
2. A social worker will explain the application and funding process. You will be sent an information package. Make a note of the name of the social worker and the date and time you spoke with him or her.
3. If your child has received a diagnosis and assessment from a BC Autism Assessment Network (BCAAN) team your assessment documentation will be forwarded directly to MCFD, if you consented to this. You will also receive the same documentation from BCAAN. If your child has received a private assessment or an assessment from outside B.C. or Canada, see “If Your Child Does Not Have a BCAAN Diagnosis” below.
4. Once the child’s documentation has been received by MCFD, eligibility for funding will be verified and arrangements will be made for the parent to visit the office to sign the funding agreement contract. If this is not possible, other arrangements will be made to sign the document.
5. Parents or guardians of children with ASD under 6 years of age must submit a Behavior Plan of Intervention (BPI) to MCFD within four months of signing the Autism Funding Agreement, written by a Behavior Consultant listed on the RASP. The parent is also responsible for sending an updated BPI annually to MCFD. This may be the only contact the parent has with MCFD unless they wish to access other services provided by MCFD outlined later in this chapter.
6. Renewal of the Invoice Payment Agreement is automatic on the month following the child’s birthday. With the renewal of the agreement comes assignment of a new billing number for the child’s service providers. A new “Request to Pay” form must be sent for each provider for each funding year.

### Children with ASD in Care

Foster children with ASD are eligible for the Autism Funding Program. If a foster parent is concerned that the foster child has undiagnosed ASD or if the child has a confirmed ASD diagnosis but is not receiving treatment, this should be discussed with his or her guardianship worker. ACT Information Officers are available to provide support and information to community professionals and foster parents seeking a diagnosis for a child suspected of having ASD.

## If Your Child Does Not Have a BCAAN Diagnosis

- **A Private Diagnosis Done in B.C.** – If you have arranged a private assessment the paperwork required is slightly different. The private assessor will provide you with the required documentation for the application process. A form for a private (non-BCAAN) diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder can be accessed at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/assess\\_diagnosis.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/assess_diagnosis.htm) or by calling 1-877-777-3530.

If your child is under six and you have opted for a private assessment, it is important to remember that for it to be accepted by MCFD, it must be a multi-disciplinary assessment. For a child six and over, a multi-disciplinary assessment is not currently required.

See Chapter 1, “The Diagnostic Process in British Columbia,” for important information on issues surrounding seeking a private diagnosis.

- **A Diagnosis from Another Canadian Province** – If your child received a diagnostic assessment from another Canadian province you will be required to have a qualified specialist (pediatrician, psychiatrist or registered psychologist) complete a Confirmation of Diagnosis form before you apply for MCFD Autism Funding Programs. A “Confirmation of Diagnosis” form can be requested by calling 1-877-777-3530 or may be downloaded from [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/assess\\_diagnosis.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/assess_diagnosis.htm).
- **A Diagnosis from Outside Canada** – If your child received a diagnosis outside of Canada a new diagnostic assessment by qualified B.C. specialists is required before you can apply for MCFD Autism Funding Programs.
- **In the Case of Children Diagnosed Prior to April 1, 2004** – Any child/youth who has a documented diagnosis of an ASD by a psychiatrist, pediatrician, neurologist, or registered psychologist prior to April 1, 2004 may be eligible for MCFD supports/funding without having to complete a re-assessment through BCAAN. Caregivers are required to provide the prior clinical reports confirming a diagnosis of an ASD meeting above requirements to a pediatrician, psychiatrist, or registered psychologist in British Columbia, and have this professional complete the Confirmation of Prior Diagnosis Form. This form must be submitted to MCFD. This form can be requested by calling 1-877-777-3530 or may be downloaded from [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/assess\\_diagnosis.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/assess_diagnosis.htm).

**Autism Funding Unit  
Contact Information**  
**Telephone:** 1-877-777-3530  
**Email:**  
[mcf.autismfundingunit@gov.bc.ca](mailto:mcf.autismfundingunit@gov.bc.ca)  
**Fax:** (250) 356-8578

## The Invoice Payment Process

MCFD's Autism Funding Unit administers autism funds for the child. The parent selects the services needed, within the requirements for eligible expenses, and the Autism Funding Unit pays the service provider directly. The service provider and the parent will be sent a letter with a billing number that must be put on any invoice submitted to the Autism Funding Unit. Parents will be reimbursed for their eligible travel, training and equipment costs after they complete and submit the Reimbursement for Autism Expenses Form found at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/forms.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/forms.htm) or from the Autism Funding Unit.

Parents are responsible for employment-related expenses, such as Employment Insurance, WorkSafe BC and Federal and Provincial Income Taxes, where there is an employer/employee relationship. MCFD will not make any of these payments on behalf of parents. Parents must make payment themselves. MCFD will reimburse parents from their account for these expenses upon submission of the Reimbursement for Autism Expense Form — see [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/forms.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/forms.htm).

## Understanding the Funding Agreement Before Signing

Understandably many parents, anxious to begin their child's treatment program, don't always take the time to read the funding agreement before they sign it. However, it is a legal document and parents must comply with its terms so it is important to read it carefully. A parent or guardian can ask the MCFD social worker to go through the Agreement point by point. Sometimes it is helpful to have the opportunity to read the agreement in advance. You can request your social worker or an ACT Information Officer to send it to you. Both the 'Under Age Six Autism Funding Agreement' and the 'Ages 6-18 Autism Funding Agreement' can be found at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/forms.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/forms.htm).

### Autism Funding Agreements: Under Age 6/Ages 6–18

This is a basic agreement where the terms and conditions are the same for every parent who signs it. It outlines:

- The Province's obligations.
- The Parent's obligations.
- The term of the agreement with beginning and ending dates.
- The terms under which the agreement can end or be terminated as a result of certain circumstances.

The following is a summary of responsibilities, as outlined in the agreement.

### The Province's Responsibilities

- To pay on behalf of the Parent for the benefit of the Child treatment funds in accordance with the amount as outlined in *A Parents' Handbook: Your Guide to Autism Programs*.

### Parental Responsibilities

- To use the funds only for expenses for the child named in the agreement.
- To provide the Autism Funding Unit with a copy of a Behavior Plan of Intervention (BPI), completed by the behavior consultant within four months of signing the agreement and on an annual basis until the child is age six.
- To be fully and solely responsible for arranging, assessing and selecting the service provider from the Registry of Autism Service Providers and Behavior Interventionists. Inclusion on the RASP is not a requirement of service providers serving children six and over.
- To fulfill obligations as an employer under the Employment Standards Act, Worker's Compensation Act, Human Rights Code, Employment Insurance Act, Income Tax Act or Canada Pension Plan Act, or similar laws to which you may be subject.
- To be solely responsible for the amounts invoiced and paid to service providers when they are:
  - Over the maximum annual funding from the province.
  - Ineligible according to the province.
  - Received by the province more than 6 months after the date of service and/or the date when the equipment was purchased.

These websites provide information to clarify your relationship and responsibilities to your child's service providers:

**Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services:**

[www.labour.gov.bc.ca/esb/facshts/employee.htm](http://www.labour.gov.bc.ca/esb/facshts/employee.htm)

**Canada Revenue Agency:** [www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pub/tg/rc4110/](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pub/tg/rc4110/)

- To notify the Autism Funding Unit in writing within 30 days:
  - In case of a change of address.
  - When the child, for whatever reason, is no longer in your care or custody.
  - When there is any change in circumstance that might eliminate or reduce the need for funding.
- To not appoint anyone else to take over the agreement.
- To not commit money or claim to commit the Province to payment of any monies with the exception of eligible expenses as outlined in *A Parents' Handbook: Your Guide to Autism Programs*.
- Not to hold the Province, its employees and agents legally responsible for any and all losses, claims, damages, actions, causes of actions, costs and expenses that may occur during or after this agreement.

For a summary of eligible and ineligible expenses, see [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/pdf/autism\\_handbook\\_web.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/pdf/autism_handbook_web.pdf). Not all eligible expenses are listed. Families should complete a Justification for Equipment/Supplies form: [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/programs/forms.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/programs/forms.htm) to ensure approval before purchasing questionable resources.

#### *A Note of Caution*

- Parents have reported to ACT that their autism funds have been used up by a service provider before the year was out and that the family had received no warning of this until they were notified by the Autism Funding Unit that their child's account was empty.
- To guard against such eventualities, it is helpful to focus on the reality that hiring service providers for your child is a business arrangement. The onus is on you as the parent to run the business in such a way that you protect the interests of your child. Initially, this is a difficult concept for many parents to grasp because they are focused on treatment, not finances, but it is essential to have a firm grasp of the practicalities. Ethical providers will appreciate parents who are aware of the issues and insure that they are paid in a timely manner. Unethical service providers will find it difficult to continue in business if all parents insist on the same high standards of accountability.

- The following are precautions that parents can take to guard their child's funding:
  - Direct the Autism Funding Unit to only process invoices that are signed by the parent or guardian.
  - Only allow a service provider to bill without signature, if there is a contract in place that commits the service provider to:
    - › Invoicing your account within specific limits that you set together.
    - › Sending a copy to you of any invoice sent to the Autism Funding Unit, at the same time as the account is invoiced.

ACT also advises that you ask the Autism Funding Unit for details of your account on a regular basis. Remember, if you have given permission for funds to be withdrawn from your account, the Autism Funding Unit will not help you recover your funds. You may need to go to small claims court to do so and without a contract it will be difficult to prove that the account was debited incorrectly. Keep track of the service that your child receives from all providers so that you can check the accuracy of accounting regularly.

### Complaints Resolution Process

ACT administers a complaint resolution process, on behalf of MCFD, to ensure that parents or guardians who experience difficulties with the conduct of a Registry of Autism Service Provider have a place to have their concerns reviewed.

For more information call the ACT office or see [www.actcommunity.net/RASP/Complaints/RASP\\_Resolution\\_Policy.html](http://www.actcommunity.net/RASP/Complaints/RASP_Resolution_Policy.html).

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF AUTISM FUNDING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

Prior to 2002, children with ASD in B.C. received no direct funding from the provincial government to support their specialized treatment needs. There were limited supports available to the family in terms of behavior consultation, respite and childcare but no focus on treatment. Often supports were restricted to families whose children were diagnosed with Autistic Disorder and not other Autism Spectrum Disorders. Most had long waiting lists.

Since June 2002, the Province of British Columbia has provided limited direct funding to families. The Autism Funding Program was established following the litigation known as "The Auton Decision." This decision was the result of a small group of families, organized by FEAT – Families for Early Autism Treatment, who jointly launched court proceedings against the provincial government. They were seeking the funding of Applied Behavior Analysis treatment programs for their children. The families asked the Court to rule that by denying funding for ABA, provincial authorities had violated certain statutes and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The families also sought an order requiring the province to pay for the cost of intervention for the children. In a ground breaking decision, the Supreme Court of British Columbia ruled in favour of the families.

Shortly after the initial court decision the Ministry of Children and Families began providing direct funding to parents and guardians of children with ASD under the age of 7 in the amount of up to \$20,000 annually. Sometime later the cut off date for \$20,000 annually was changed to a child's 6th birthday.

In 2003, following another court case in which a group of families were successful, funding was extended to children and youth with ASD from their 6th birthday to their 19th birthday. Parents and guardians of children with ASD may receive funding up to \$6000 per year for autism intervention until the month of their child's 19th birthday.

The B.C. Court decisions in favour of the 'Auton Case' families were overturned by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2004. However, the legacy of the important efforts made by these families remains as the Autism Funding Programs have been continued.

## OTHER SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES

In addition to the Autism Funding Programs, there are a number of other, more generic services for children with special needs, which children with ASD are eligible to receive. Families can access some of these directly; for others, they must have a referral through the Ministry of Children and Families.

The key MCFD contact person for a family who has a child with special needs is the social worker. According to the definition on the MCFD website, the role of the social worker is to “inform and refer parents to services provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development and link families with community-based supports and services.”



Having a child with special needs puts significant pressure on a family. Especially in the early years, few families can cope without asking for help from their families and friends. They also need to communicate directly with their social worker and make clear the needs of their child for services and supports beyond autism funding.

When the parent or guardian meets the social worker to complete the Autism Funding Agreement, the social worker may explain about other programs and supports. However, there is a lot of information for a family to process following a diagnosis of ASD. It may be better to meet at a later date to discuss other needs.

It is likely there will be times when a parent will have to advocate for their child with special needs. You may have to write a letter to your social worker, outlining your need for support, especially if there is a waiting list for the service that your child requires. Chapter 7, “The Role of Parental Advocacy in Navigating the School System,” has information that can be applied to any situation where strong advocacy skills are needed. Above all, you want to avoid waiting until your family is in crisis. Having a properly developed plan, with adequate supports in place, is the best way to avoid a crisis!

The next section describes the following services:

- Behavioral Support Services.
- Child and Youth Care Workers.
- Professional Support Services.
- Parent Support.
- Respite.
- Homemaker/Home Support Worker.
- Residential Services for Children in Care.
- Infant Development Program.
- Aboriginal Infant Development Program.
- Early Intervention Therapies Program.
- School-Aged Therapies Program.
- Supported Child Development Programs.
- At Home Program.
- Child Care Subsidy.
- Transition Planning to Adulthood.

In addition to the Parent’s Manual, ACT has several “foundation” videos available online. These give parents and community professionals essential information on:

- The Art of Advocacy
- Practical Autism Treatment
- What is ABA and Why is Important in the Treatment of Autism

For previews and bursary information, see [www.actcommunity.net/webcast/CurrentWebcasts.htm](http://www.actcommunity.net/webcast/CurrentWebcasts.htm).

## Family Support Services

Behavioral Support Services, Child and Youth Care Workers, Professional Support Services, Parent Support, Respite and Homemaker/Home Support Worker are all considered as part of Family Support Services by MCFD. They are described only briefly on the MCFD website at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec\\_needs/family\\_support\\_services.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/family_support_services.htm) where parents are advised to contact their regional MCFD offices to access services. Given that many of these services are likely to have waiting lists, ACT advises that you ensure that you are at least on the waiting list by documenting in writing your service request and keeping a record of commitments from your social worker.

### Behavioral Support Services

This program has a long history. It was developed by MCFD at a time when there were no treatment funds available to families who had children with autism. Now the program is open to children with a range of behavioral disorders. The focus of this program is on behavior management and is not to be confused with the type of autism treatment that may be available to parents utilizing their autism treatment funds. This program, however, may be very helpful for families of school-aged children if the person providing it is skilled in Positive Behavior Support. MCFD contracts with community agencies or individuals to provide behavior support.

Ideally children who were diagnosed at an early age and received effective intervention by well-qualified behavior consultants will not express significant negative behaviors when they are older. Despite a common belief, significant behavioral problems in older children with ASD are not an inevitable consequence of ASD. Many families report that the best behaved child in their family is the child with ASD, but the key is working on behavior issues when the child is as young as possible.

The Behavioral Support for Children with Autism Program is available to families who have children with ASD under age 19, regardless if they receive autism funding. There is a similar program that serves families with children who have other disabilities. Parents may have to advocate for this support. These programs may have a long waitlist. Remember that if you don't go on a waitlist you will never get to the top!

### Child and Youth Care Workers

This program provides children and families with a specialized child-care worker who assists the child to learn social skills, life skills and/or to support the family to learn parenting/child management skills. In many communities there is a waiting list for this program.

### Professional Support Services

MCFD contracts with community professionals to provide specialized support including assessment, training, counselling, planning and other support for the child, their family and/or other caregivers who support the child.

### Parent Support

MCFD contracts with local community agencies to provide parent support groups, parent skills training, counselling, life skills and organized activities. These services are usually not autism specific and generally speaking these services are designed for children with developmental disabilities. Some families find these groups helpful. Others who are looking for an autism-specific group may consult the ACT website at [www.actcommunity.net/AI/Resources/Groups.htm](http://www.actcommunity.net/AI/Resources/Groups.htm), which lists community groups, or telephone the ACT office.

### Respite

Parenting a child with autism can be very challenging and exhausting. Planning ahead to avert exhaustion is wise. Many families find that establishing a good working relationship with a respite caregiver can be very helpful. A respite caregiver provides care to the child while other family members have an opportunity to rest, regroup and develop strategies to make life less stressful.

It is possible to hire a respite caregiver who is a family member who does not live in your home, a supportive friend, or someone who contracts with MCFD. It can be a challenge to find the right person but successful parents report that this program works well for them, especially if the respite provider uses and reinforces the same strategies used by the family.

Based on the child's and the family's needs, the MCFD social worker will help determine the best respite option. Respite can happen either in the child's home, the respite provider's home, or in a staffed setting – although the later is unlikely in the case of young children.

Payment may be provided by giving the parent funds directly to hire a respite provider, or by contracting with community service providers or approved resources.

An excellent resource for choosing a caregiver for a child with special needs can be found at [www.cridge.org/Choosing\\_a\\_Caregiver.pdf](http://www.cridge.org/Choosing_a_Caregiver.pdf).

## Homemaker/Home Support Worker

This program is designed to support families who are in a crisis situation. Services offered may include emergency childcare, respite, homemaking and household management.

MCFD contracts with community agencies to provide this service. It does not replace regularly planned respite and childcare services and is temporary in nature.

## Residential Services for Children in Care

There are many reasons why a child with ASD may come into care of the province other than via the child protection system. Some children come into care to access specific supports or a program that is not available in their home community. Other families access this service while they develop new skills or recover from illness or for reasons not related to a child needing protection from abuse.

There are many types of foster care:

- *Regular homes* are homes that provide a general level of care that is not specialized.
- *Restricted homes* are homes where the family knows the child already or are related to the child.
- *Specialized homes* are homes where a higher level of skill is required of the caregivers to address issues like physical, mental, emotional or behavioral needs. There are levels of specialized homes based on the expertise of the caregivers.
  1. Staffed Family Model Home – These homes are based on a family model but the caregivers are specialized staff persons. These homes are developed for children with very high needs.
  2. Staffed Specialized Home – These homes are designed for short-term stays, for assessment or treatment prior to the child's return home or to foster care.

## Infant Development Program (IDP)

This family-centered program is designed for those who are parenting children under age 3 who either have developmental delays or disabilities, or are at risk of developing them. IDP is available in most areas of B.C. and is funded by MCFD. IDP works closely with Aboriginal IDP and they share the same goals.

If you have a child under age 3 and have concerns about his or her development, you can call your closest Infant Development Program office. It is not necessary to have a referral from your social worker. Children can also be referred by a doctor, public health nurse or other community professional.

To locate government offices and telephone them free of charge, contact Enquiry BC in Vancouver: 604-660-2421; in Victoria: 250-387-6121; toll-free elsewhere in B.C.: 1-800-663-7867; and outside B.C.: 604-660-2421.

To find the closest Infant Development Program office, go to [www.idpofbc.ca/findidp.html](http://www.idpofbc.ca/findidp.html) or call the ACT office.

Parents play a central role in determining the type of support they receive from the Infant Development Program, which can include:

- Home visits to encourage progress, develop new activities and support parents.
- Developmental assessments and written reports.
- Playgroup with parent participation.
- Parent workshops or support groups.
- Therapy consultation.
- A toy and book lending library.
- Assistance for you and your child making the transition to a preschool/day care program.
- Service coordination.

## Aboriginal Infant Development Program (AIDP)

Aboriginal IDP, in most communities, serves families with children up to age 6 and has the same referral processes as for IDP. AIDP offers services specifically for aboriginal families, which can include:

- Home visits, playgroups, parent education opportunities, parent support groups, parent to parent connections.
- Assisting the family in planning activities that will encourage the optimum development of their child.
- A resource library of books and toys that is available on loan to families.
- Screening and assessment that is culturally sensitive and meaningful. ([www.aidp.bc.ca/](http://www.aidp.bc.ca/))

To find your closest Aboriginal Infant Development Program, you can go online to [www.aidp.bc.ca/community\\_program\\_info.html](http://www.aidp.bc.ca/community_program_info.html) or call the ACT office.

## Early Intervention Therapies Program

Contracted community agencies offer these services in home, preschool, childcare and community settings. Occupational therapy, speech-language pathology and family support worker services are made available to preschool children who have or are at risk for a developmental delay or disability including Autism Spectrum Disorder. Services include: screening, assessment, intervention, consultation, education and training to parents and community members, and service coordination.

For an overview of provincial guidelines, reissued by MCFD in January 2009, see *Early Intervention Therapy Program Guidelines* available at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec\\_needs/pdf/ei\\_therapy\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/pdf/ei_therapy_guidelines.pdf) or contact your MCFD office for a copy. Your social worker can provide you with more specific information about local early intervention therapies in your own area.

## School-Aged Therapies Program

The School-Aged Therapies Program is a continuation of the Early Intervention Therapies Program. It is jointly funded by the Ministries of Children and Family Development and Education to provide core occupational and physical therapy services to children from age 6 or school entry to age 19. The objective is to help children with special needs achieve optimal independence and to assist them in meeting their educational goals. Ideally, the therapist works with family members, teachers and teaching assistants to support the student's participation, inclusion and access to learning opportunities. Services are provided in home, school, child care and community settings to assist children and youth with special needs to achieve their highest level of independent functioning.

The MCFD website describes the eligibility criteria for the program: "Children and youth with special needs who have, or are at risk for, a developmental delay or disability and who are displaying a 'demonstrated need' have access to this program from school entry until school exit." ([www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec\\_needs/school\\_aged\\_therapies.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/school_aged_therapies.htm)) However, occupational therapy and physical therapy services for school age children can be very limited in some communities; in others funding levels are considerably higher. Each agency and/or school district appears to utilize a range of methods of caseload management for this program. These include a consultation model where the professional advise those who work with the student versus direct intervention where the therapist works with the student. Other districts narrow accessibly even more by specifying that a child must be on the At Home Program or have feeding and positioning needs. Still others limit service to elementary school children, leaving secondary school students without access to school-based therapies.

For more information on the role of Speech, Occupational and Physical Therapists see Chapter 3 "Developing a Treatment Team for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder."

Contact the local school district for information about their School-Aged Therapies Program. As discussed in Chapter 7 of this manual, “The Role of Parental Advocacy in Navigating the School System”, it may be necessary for parents to advocate to ensure that their child’s needs for speech, occupational or physical therapy are met.

## Supported Child Development Program (SCDP)

Supported Child Development is a voluntary, community-based program that assists families of children with extra support needs to access inclusive childcare. The program is intended to serve children from birth to 12 years, with services for youth 13–19 years available in some communities. While SCD is provided at no cost to families, parents are still responsible for the basic costs of child care. Child care subsidy may be available for low-income families.

SCDP provides the following services to support children, families, and child care providers:

- Individual planning to promote each child’s development.
- Training and information for families and child care providers to help each child’s development.
- Resources such as books, toys and specialized equipment.
- Referrals to other services such as therapists or specialists.
- Where necessary, additional staffing to ensure that children may participate fully with their peers. ([www.scdp.bc.ca/About%20SCDP.htm](http://www.scdp.bc.ca/About%20SCDP.htm))

The Ministry of Children and Family Development provides funds to operate local SCDP programs. To find out how to access SCDP in your area you may call your local MCFD office or you can access [www.scdp.bc.ca/SCDP%20Program%20Locations.htm](http://www.scdp.bc.ca/SCDP%20Program%20Locations.htm) for a listing of BC programs. No special referral process is required. You can refer yourself by calling your local Supported Child Development Program office.

## At Home Program (AHP)

The At Home Program was designed to assist parents with some of the extraordinary costs involved in raising a child with severe disabilities at home. The program is not specifically for families who have children with ASD; in fact, many children on the spectrum will not meet the eligibility criteria for the program, as the focus is on children with physical disabilities. However, many children with ASD, while having the physical capacity to toilet, feed or dress themselves, do not do so because of the affect autism has on their development. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

There are two programs within the AHP: Respite Benefits and Medical Benefits. The Respite Benefits Program provides families with direct funding to pay towards alternate care of their child while the family regroups and regains energy to face the ongoing challenges of raising a child with special needs.

The criteria for eligibility for the AHP is as follows:

- Age 18 or younger for respite benefits.
- Age 17 or younger for medical benefits.
- A resident of B.C.
- Living at home with a parent or guardian.
- Assessed as dependent in at least three of four areas of daily living (i.e., the functional skills related to washing, toileting, feeding and dressing).

In order to qualify for At Home Program Medical Benefits, a child must also be enrolled with the BC Medical Services Plan. Children who require direct nursing care through Nursing Support Services are eligible for At Home Program Medical Benefits. An At Home Program assessment is not required. Children who have a palliative condition qualify for full At Home Program benefits. An assessment is not required.

Children with Indian Status who are also eligible for the At Home Program may receive the AHP benefits not duplicated by First Nation and Inuit Health, the Government of Canada, or by the Band or Aboriginal Agency. Children or parents who are in receipt of an insurance settlement or court award are not eligible for At Home Program benefits. Eligibility is reassessed on a regular basis.

([www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at\\_home/enroll.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at_home/enroll.htm))

Respite care through the At Home Program is designed so parents can choose the type of care that best meets their needs. Funds may not be used to pay the parent of the child or a dependent household member who resides with the family. Parents may select any other caregiver of their choice and the care can be provided in a location of their choice.

Parents maintain full responsibility for selecting and scheduling caregivers, paying caregivers, managing their respite budget and submitting a record of expenditures. In most cases the parent is considered to be the employer of the respite caregiver so a parent must be ready to assume all responsibilities of an employer.

The amount of money provided by MCFD is usually \$2400 to \$2800 per year, although in some exceptional cases these funds may be increased to address extraordinary circumstances.

Medical Benefits are made available for qualifying children aged 17 or younger and cover the following basic medical benefits:

- Dental/orthodontic and optical benefits.
- Hearing aids.
- Medical equipment.
- Medical services plan coverage.
- Medical supplies.
- Incontinence supplies.
- Medical transportation.
- Medications & pharmacare.
- School-aged extended therapies. ([www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at\\_home/med\\_benefits.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at_home/med_benefits.htm))

Complete details on these specific benefits can be obtained online at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at\\_home/med\\_benefits.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at_home/med_benefits.htm) or by telephoning toll-free: 1-888-613-3232.

### The Application Process

- Obtain an application form—online at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at\\_home/enroll.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at_home/enroll.htm), from a MCFD office, or your local Health Unit.
- Complete the parent portion of the application form and have your child's doctor complete the brief medical portion of the form.
- Submit the completed application to your Regional At Home Program contact. You can find your contact address at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at\\_home](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at_home), or by asking your MCFD office or the local Health Unit.

## What Happens Next

1. The regional contact person will review the application and arrange for an assessment to be completed by a qualified assessor. The assessor meets the child and parents in the family home to complete the assessment of the child's abilities in four areas of daily living: eating, dressing, toileting and washing. This assessment will include observing the child and interviewing the parent(s) regarding the child's skills in these areas. It is important for the parent to provide an honest appraisal of the child's abilities, but it is wise to provide the overview of how the child functions on both good and bad days since functioning can vary in the same child depending on many circumstances. The assessor may also contact the child's doctor or other health care professionals to review the child's needs. A copy of the assessment is provided to the parent.
2. A regional eligibility committee reviews the application and assessment report and makes a decision. To be eligible for both medical and respite benefits, a child must be dependent in all four daily living areas. Those children who are dependent in three out of four daily living areas are eligible for either the medical or respite benefits but not both. Determining the child's functional level is done by comparing the child's abilities to those of a "typical" child of the same age. The child will qualify only if they require significantly more assistance than their same-aged typical counterpart. In other words, it may be more difficult for some younger children to qualify in these daily living areas since typical infants and toddlers are very dependent. A letter is sent to the parents advising them of the eligibility decision. If the child does not qualify, the family will be referred to other supports or services.
3. If approval is provided for one of the two programs, the At Home Regional Contact Person will assist in initiating the benefits. Respite and medical benefits are coordinated through MCFD. Your child's social worker can help you complete the paperwork and coordinate the renewal process.
4. Parents have the right to appeal or complain if they disagree with the decision or feel they have not been treated fairly. MCFD can provide information about the At Home Program appeal process and about the Complaint Resolution Process through MCFD. If the complaint or disagreement is about the medical benefits decision parents should contact the Manager of Medical Benefits at MCFD for information about that appeal process. Please call the ACT office if you are having difficulties in making a complaint.

## Child Care Subsidy

Parents who meet eligibility criteria may receive a monthly payment to partially or fully cover the ongoing costs of child care. The funding can be used in the following child care settings: licensed, registered license-not-required (RLNR) or license-not-required family child care facilities; licensed group child care centres; licensed out-of-school programs; licensed preschool programs; or in the child's own home.

The subsidy funding is provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

You may be eligible for Child Care Subsidy if you:

- Are employed or self-employed.
- Are attending an educational institution or enrolled in distance education.
- Are seeking employment or participating in an employment-related program.
- Have a medical condition which interferes with your ability to care for your child.
- Have a child attending a Licensed Preschool.
- Have been referred by an MCFD or delegated Aboriginal Agency social worker.

A calculation that takes into account your income and family size determines eligibility. If you earn less than the income exemption level for your family size, and you meet one of the criteria above, you may be eligible for a full subsidy. If you earn more than the income exemption for your family size and you meet the above criteria, you may be eligible for a partial subsidy ([www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/app\\_process.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/app_process.htm)).

An online evaluator that you can complete will assist you in determining whether you might be eligible for subsidy. This can be found at [www.child-caresubsidy.gov.bc.ca/ChildCareSubsidyEvaluator/Step00.aspx](http://www.child-caresubsidy.gov.bc.ca/ChildCareSubsidyEvaluator/Step00.aspx).

Subsidy services in BC are provided by the Child Care Subsidy Service Centre (CCSSC) at PO Box 9953 Stn Prov Govt, Victoria BC V8W 9Z9

Telephone: 1 888 338-6622

Fax: 1 888 999-0998 for Vancouver Island

Fax: 1 877 544-0699 outside Vancouver Island

Office hours: 7:00 am to 6:00 pm Pacific Standard Time, Monday to Friday, excluding statutory holidays.

## The Application Process

- Complete the Child Care Subsidy Application (CF2900). Questions in this form focus on your contact information, citizenship or immigration status, marital status, whether you are a foster parent, part of the young parent program (a youth attending school with a child in an approved young care child care setting), receiving “child in the home of a relative” assistance or none of the above, information about your spouse, the reason you and your spouse require child care, information about dependent adults and dependent children in your custody, and your family income. This form can be downloaded at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/pdfs/CF2900\\_JUL06.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/pdfs/CF2900_JUL06.pdf) or obtained from the Child Care Subsidy Service Centre.
- Complete the Child Care Subsidy Care Provider (CF2798) form that asks you to provide basic information about your child’s care provider. You and your care provider must sign this form. A form must be completed for each care provider you use. The online form is at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/pdfs/CF2798\\_JUL06.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/pdfs/CF2798_JUL06.pdf).
- Since your child has special needs, have an authorized professional complete the complete the Child Care Subsidy Special Needs Form. The professional must confirm that the child has a physical, intellectual, emotional, communicative or behavioral impairment and would require additional support services in a child care setting because of this impairment. If this is the case, you may qualify for the Supported Child Development Program. The online form is at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child-care/pdfs/CF2951\\_JUL06.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child-care/pdfs/CF2951_JUL06.pdf).

Depending on your individual circumstances you may be required to complete other forms:

- If you have any medical condition that impacts your ability to care for your children, complete the Child Care Subsidy Medical Condition Form (CF2914) that requires you and your physician to provide information about your medical condition. The online form is at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/pdfs/CF2568\\_JUL06.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/pdfs/CF2568_JUL06.pdf).
- If you are self-employed, complete the Child Care Subsidy Self-employment Form (CF2568) which requires you to provide financial information about your business operation and income. The online form is at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/pdfs/CF2568\\_MAR08.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/pdfs/CF2568_MAR08.pdf).
- If you need to renew your subsidy application, complete the Renewal Form (CF2901B). Completion of this form is required, at a minimum, annually.

- These forms and informational guides can also be by calling the Child Care Help Line at 1-888-338-6622. They can also be obtained at a Service BC – Government Agents office or at an Immigrant Settlement Services Agency. Contact information about these resources can be obtained by calling Enquiry BC in Victoria at 250-387-6121, in Greater Vancouver at 604-660-2421, elsewhere in BC at 1-800-663-7867, or outside BC at 604-660-2421. Hours of operation for Enquiry BC are 7:30 am to 5 pm PST, Monday through Friday.

There are Child Care Resource and Referral offices in some centres across the province, although recent cutbacks may have resulted in some closures. These not-for-profit agencies are funded by MCFD to provide support, resources and referral services for parents and child care providers in local communities. Parents can obtain information about types of available child care, how to assess whether a child care setting will be appropriate for the child, what the components of a quality child care operation are, how to apply for the Child Care Subsidy, and other parent educational materials and opportunities. These agencies also provide support to developing new and existing child care providers. The website for the Child Care Resource and Referral is [www.crr.bc.ca](http://www.crr.bc.ca).

To find your Child Care Resource and Referral agency, call the Child Care Help Line in the Victoria area at 250-356-6501 or outside greater Victoria, toll free, at 1-888-338-6622.

## Transition Planning to Adulthood

In British Columbia, adults with autism and/or developmental disabilities receive services primarily through Community Living British Columbia (CLBC), a crown corporation. Historically, if an adult with an Autism Spectrum Disorder had an IQ over 70, they were ineligible for CLBC services. This presented a particular frustration for many families as academic skills (the focus of IQ testing) are widely accepted as irrelevant to the support needs of vulnerable adults with autism.

Thanks to sustained advocacy by B.C. parents of vulnerable adult children with IQ's over 70, a new regulatory amendment is scheduled for January of 2010. This expands the current Community Living BC (CLBC) eligibility criteria. The Personalized Supports Initiative (PSI) uses a comprehensive approach that assesses issues of significant limitations in adaptive functioning. For updates, visit [www.communitylivingbc.ca/what\\_we\\_do/personalized\\_supports\\_initiative.htm](http://www.communitylivingbc.ca/what_we_do/personalized_supports_initiative.htm).

If the youth is deemed eligible for services, at the age of 19, their MCFD Social Worker is replaced by a Facilitator and an Analyst from CLBC. For more information on CLBC services for adults with autism and eligibility requirements, see [www.communitylivingbc.ca](http://www.communitylivingbc.ca).

This transition to adulthood has been recognized by government as a time where families have felt frustrated by the lack of integration between government ministries and CLBC. To address this issue, in October 2009, government ministries and CLBC signed an important protocol setting out their commitment to effective transitioning of individuals with special needs to adult services. Parents who are advocating for their children, or self-advocates may want to review the protocol. See [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec\\_needs/pdf/transition\\_planning\\_protocol.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/pdf/transition_planning_protocol.pdf).

In most cases, youth with ASD will qualify for income support through the Ministry of Housing and Social Development and they may qualify for other employment programs and services through the same Ministry. See [www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/links/pwd.htm](http://www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/links/pwd.htm).

A key consideration to planning for the transition to adulthood is to begin considering the issues when the child with special needs becomes a teenager. For more information on preparing for the transition to adulthood, see Chapter 8, “Preparing for the Transition from School to Work,” in this manual. ACT’s Information Officers are available to support families and community professionals with information in this process.



