
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2018CFD0055-001654
Aug. 29, 2018

Ministry of Children and Family Development
Representative for Children and Youth

Breastfeeding action plan promotes stronger bonds

This release was updated on Aug. 30, 2018

VICTORIA – Vulnerable women and their newborn infants will benefit from a five-point action plan to support family connections and mother-child bonds, while keeping children safe.

The plan is part of a joint special report by Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and the representative for children and youth (RCY), released Aug. 29, 2018. Promoting Access to Breastfeeding in Child Welfare Matters found that, on average, more than 500 infants under 12 months old entered government care each year from 2013-14 to 2017-18. Of these infants, nearly 60% were Indigenous, highlighting a concern that the over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in care begins in infancy.

In 2017-18, 197 infants who were less than seven days old were brought into care. Both MCFD and the RCY want to see that number decrease. They want to ensure that infants who are brought into care have access to the health, developmental and attachment benefits that breastfeeding can provide.

The joint report outlines clear actions that MCFD will take to support vulnerable women and their infants:

- Review and update practice directives for social workers to plan with families to keep mothers and infants together, including consideration of the supporting role of extended family and communities.
- Develop guidelines for social workers to promote breastfeeding when an infant has been separated from his or her birth mother, including facilitating breastfeeding, ways to make breastmilk available to the infant, providing breast pumps and addressing breastfeeding within the context of substance use.
- Research supportive housing alternatives where mothers and their infants at risk can be placed, and develop a plan to implement these resources.
- Work with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and Indigenous partners to improve access to programs that provide prenatal and post-partum care for women who use substances and to their infants.
- Work with RCY to improve access to RCY's advocacy services for families and service providers.

MCFD makes decisions every day that balance a newborn's safety with the importance of maintaining parental access to promote attachment, while RCY's advocates regularly work on cases where access to support breastfeeding is an issue. Both organizations agreed to collaborate to explore actions that could be taken in B.C. to promote family preservation.

The joint report was initiated after, in spring 2018, the B.C. Supreme Court ordered MCFD to increase a mother's access to her infant for breastfeeding and bonding, and a provincial court ruled that MCFD had not adequately considered the supports that were available in the mother's First Nations community to keep the family together.

The report was informed by a review of relevant literature, a look at policies and programs in other jurisdictions, and visits to support programs in Vancouver. It also considered recent MCFD data on infants who entered care within 12 months of birth, and RCY advocacy data where access or custody to support breastfeeding was a factor.

Quotes:

Katrine Conroy, Minister of Children and Family Development —

“As a mother and a grandmother, I understand the importance of breastfeeding for an infant's development and for building the mother-child bond. As a ministry, it is so important that as part of our commitment to keeping children safe and connected to their families and communities, we are promoting and enabling opportunities for new mums to breastfeed. Together with the independent representative, we have outlined clear steps we will take to better support mothers and infants and increase opportunities for breastfeeding. It's one more way we can support family connections, keep infants with their parents and help reduce the number of children who come into care in the first place.”

Bernard Richard, representative for children and youth —

“At the end of the day, I want to see fewer infants taken into care and separated from their birth mothers, beginning what is often a childhood in care. This action plan is a good initial step towards this goal. Infants deserve the long-term health benefits of breastfeeding and attachment, and all children deserve to grow up in a stable family environment. Progress was made on this issue by working collaboratively with the ministry to identify the scope of the problem and agree on actions that will change practice. My office will continue to monitor to ensure that the action plan makes a real difference in reducing the number of infants brought into care in this province.”

Learn More:

To view a copy of the report, visit: www.gov.bc.ca/breastfeeding_jointreport

Or: <https://rcybc.ca/breastfeeding>

Contacts:

Government Communications and Public
Engagement
Ministry of Children and Family Development
250 356-0233

Jeff Rud
Executive Director, Communications
Representative for Children and Youth
Jeff.Rud@rcybc.ca
Cell: 250 216-4725

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: news.gov.bc.ca/connect