



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Representative: Support past age 19 for youth from care is moral, economic imperative

VICTORIA – In a new report released today, B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth Jennifer Charlesworth is recommending long-overdue changes to supports for youth transitioning out of government care to provide them with the same kind of sustained support that young people who aren't in care typically receive from their families.

The report, *A Parent's Duty: Government's Obligation to Youth Transitioning into Adulthood*, pulls together decades of research findings - along with findings from nine previous B.C. reports done on this same subject in the last six years - to argue for urgently needed change for youth transitioning out of care.

"Those of us who have parented youth in the transition to adulthood know that young people need ongoing and flexible supports that let them develop their independence gradually, and safely work through the challenges that life throws at all of us in those years," says Charlesworth. "That same approach is all the more important for young people transitioning out of government care."

Turning 19 is a frightening precipice for the more than 800 youth a year who experience that birthday while in government care. Young people coming out of care are disproportionately at risk of homelessness, lower education levels, reduced earning potential and poorer mental health.

They are also disproportionately First Nations, Métis, Urban Indigenous and Inuit. These groups make up six per cent of the population in B.C. but account for almost two-thirds of children and youth in care.

The pandemic has demonstrated that government can act quickly to make the kind of changes that advocates have long been asking for to strengthen support for young people in government care, notes the Representative. Since March 2020, B.C. youth have been able to stay put in their current living arrangements past their 19th birthdays, and agreements with young people living independently have been extended.

“These past few months have demonstrated that it’s possible to do things differently,” says Charlesworth. “And it’s certainly essential to do things differently. Knowing all that we know, we cannot continue to abandon these young people.”

The report includes the following recommendations, to be implemented for the most part by April 2022:

- Extend and improve transition planning, starting no later than a youth’s 14th birthday and continuing beyond age 19.
- Provide ongoing adult guidance and support by implementing dedicated youth transition workers through community agencies to engage with young people before they turn 19 and provide systems navigation support, case management and adult guidance up to the age of 27 years.
- Ensure continuing post-majority support by automatically enrolling all young people transitioning out of any type of government care in the Agreements with Young Adults program as of their 19th birthday and continuing until their 27th birthday. Currently, the vast majority of eligible youth do not access the program.
- Consider an extension of voluntary residential care by evaluating and building on the results of current COVID-19 emergency measures that have permitted young people to continue to stay in their foster home or staffed residential placements past their 19th birthdays.
- Provide additional dedicated housing for youth aging out of care through a plan led by B.C. Housing to end youth homelessness, with particular attention to youth transitioning out of care.
- Provide an enhanced range of trauma-informed and culturally appropriate mental health and substance use services for young people transitioning from care into adulthood.
- Collect longitudinal data and evaluate services for young people who have transitioned out of care.

“Issues of cost have often been raised in response to recommendations to expand support for these young people,” says Charlesworth. “But this report cites research that clearly demonstrates that the status quo is by far the most expensive option and that investing in these young people would ultimately result in substantial savings for government.

“Not only is supporting youth transitioning to adulthood a moral obligation, but it’s also financially prudent, which is imperative in these difficult economic times.”

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