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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

No youth should age out of care, shelter or service in a pandemic

Ottawa, ON – Youth who are in or have experience of being in care face an uncertain future that is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the exception of Quebec, where youth transition out of care at the age of 18, all provinces and territories offer some form of post in-care services up to the age of 21. But that support varies greatly across the country both in what is offered and who is eligible.

Youth in care networks from across the country, the Child Welfare League of Canada, A Way Home Canada and the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada are concerned for the well-being of these young adults, many of whom live in very precarious situations. We call on provincial and territorial governments, and on all agencies serving young people in and from care to immediately implement the following four urgent measures.

1. Immediately and indefinitely suspend legislated aged cut-offs for youth reaching the age of majority

Youth who have reached the age where they would transition out of care should be permitted to remain in their current placements and receive supports – no files should be closed, nor should any services be withdrawn, including access to extended care workers and supports that would otherwise be conditional on being in school or in training. Where youth have applied and are waiting for services, applications should be processed without delay.

2. Immediately provide free accessible mental health services and maintain family and cultural connections for youth in and from care

Youth are particularly vulnerable to PTSD triggers due to forced isolation. Pursue regular meetings between youth, caregivers, and social workers. Youth need their family more than ever. **Protect and promote family and cultural connections** for youth, especially for First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth, and Black, racialized and LGBTQ2S+ youth who are overrepresented in care. Provide free mental health supports (i.e. counselling, psychologist, psychiatrist, Elders), using phone, online chat and video conferencing to maintain continuity of connection.

3. Reach out to those who have recently transitioned out of care and offer additional supports required for their survival, with no eligibility criteria or conditions attached

Youth who are or have been in care should have immediate access to housing and financial support for all necessities, including rent, groceries and medications. Youth with disabilities should have access to additional resources that meet their specific needs. No arbitrary cut off date should be imposed on these essential services, with a “don't ask, don't tell” approach being implemented to ensure young people with a precarious status are not left behind.

Governments should provide access to bridge funding for all former youth in care, those who are leaving or have recently left detention, and those in precarious housing situations. As most child protection systems do not track youth once they have aged out of the system, communication of this funding should be made via a public call and include an outreach number for youth who are in need of supports. Funds should be made accessible to youth

from the child welfare system irrespective of age and without intrusive documentation processes.

4. When young people come to you seeking housing and services, do not turn them away

The risk for placement abuse and intimate partner violence increases with social distancing measures. Young people in and from care may be looking for alternative placements and safer housing arrangements. Child welfare agencies should continue to check in with young people and reach out to those living independently and be prepared to take action to address unsafe situations.

Youth shelters and housing providers should be granted flexibility and supported to create alternative arrangements to ensure young people can remain housed. If there are circumstances where youth present with symptoms of COVID-19, immediate measures should be taken to quarantine. **No young person should be turned away from housing.**

All governments should immediately suspend evictions, including from higher education dormitories – many persons in and from the child welfare system may not have a safe or adequate 'home' to go to.

We thank the frontline workers, advocates, families, and all the youth who are doing their part to protect and connect with young people in and from care in this uniquely vulnerable time. We call on governments and agencies to implement the measures highlighted above, thereby working to ensure the best protective steps are taken for youth in and from care.

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Youth in Care Canada is a national, charitable organization driven by youth and alumni from child welfare authorities across Canada. YICC exists to share the expertise, opinions and concerns of youth in and from care. Since 1985 we have engaged young people in and from care, and those who work with them, in research, policy development, and the training of caregivers and child welfare professionals; we assist, support and promote the development of provincial and community-level youth in care networks across Canada; and we help to further the national and international youth in care networking movement.

Centre Amitié, Ressources et Entraide pour la Jeunesse (C.A.R.E Jeunesse) is a provincial, bilingual non-profit organization founded by alumni of care, that provides support to youth in care and alumni from care in Quebec. C.A.R.E Jeunesse was created by alumni of care to improve the quality of life in, and after, care placements by providing a safe environment for

members to connect and form supportive relationships as well as providing advocacy, education and empowerment opportunities.

The organization connects youth and older alumni to resources, examines policies related to youth in care and offers training and consultation to professionals on the issues relevant to youth in care. C.A.R.E Jeunesse offers support to youth and alumni from all child protection placements, including but not limited to foster homes, group homes and a range of residential centres. C.A.R.E Jeunesse is widely inclusive and welcomes members from all backgrounds, abilities, cultures, religions, genders, sexual orientations and ethnicities.

The Montreal Youth in Care Alumni Student Association (MYCASA) was created by and for youth in care alumni who are attending post-secondary in Montreal. This peer-led association provides a safe and non-judgmental community that encourages youth in care alumni to network, support and advocate for each other throughout their post-secondary journeys, and make their voices heard.

The Ontario Children's Advocacy Coalition is a non partisan, First-Voice Advocates led initiative championing lived expert leadership. OCAC is comprised of persons with experience with child welfare/adoption, youth criminal justice system, mental health spectrum, disabilities, homelessness spectrum, and GLBTQ* communities. We believe in educating the community about child rights, needs of disenfranchised and marginalized populations, and working with young people to develop skills and experiences relating to wellbeing, rights, and empowerment. OCAC believes in an Ontario where vulnerable children and young people are supported to become thriving adults. The OCAC was founded as a response to the closure of the Ontario Child Advocate's Office.

Fostering Change seeks to change public policy for youth 'aging out' of government care in BC. Our campaign consists of Community Organizers with lived experience applying all they can to this work to make change. Fostering Change is an initiative of First Call: BC's Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition.

The Child Welfare League of Canada is a national, membership-based charitable organization that advocates for and promotes legislation, policy, research, programs, and services that address the underlying causes of precarity and trauma. We aspire for all children to thrive, to know that they are loved, and to have a sense of belonging.

A Way Home Canada is a national coalition reimagining solutions to youth homelessness through transformations in policy, planning, practice and innovation. A Way Home works with all orders of government, communities, services providers and philanthropy to create a policy, investment and service environment that enables a shift away from simply "managing" the problem of youth homelessness through emergency services to a more proactive, rights-based approach that focuses on prevention (stopping young people from becoming homeless in the first place) and helping those who are homeless move into housing with supports as rapidly as possible in a safe and planned way. Our collective work is evidence-driven and solutions-focused.

Children's Aid Foundation of Canada has been committed to improving the lives of children and youth involved in the child welfare system for 40 years. Thanks to our incredible donors, we're able to reach more children and youth in and from care and create greater access to the supports they need so they can live full, rich lives. In 2018-19, in partnership with our donors and 74 child- and youth-serving agency partners, we supported more than 22,200 vulnerable young people and 3,500 families across Canada.

