

June 23, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aging out in a pandemic: this isn't over!

Ottawa, ON – When the pandemic was declared, youth-in-care networks from across the country, the Child Welfare League of Canada, A Way Home Canada, and many others called for a moratorium on youth transitions out of child welfare. All but two jurisdictions took swift action, ensuring thousands of youth could shelter in place, and access programs and resources that they would otherwise have lost.

Some of those moratoriums are set to lift in the coming weeks and months. Youth are worried.

A recent [study](#) from Quebec, where there is no moratorium on transitions, found that the pandemic was diminishing access to housing, strongly accentuating risks linked to mental health problems in already vulnerable populations, limiting the ability to continue studies, and hampering access to employment. The pandemic may also increase the likelihood of youth being needlessly apprehended by the justice system.

Over the last three months, we have seen the negative impact of the pandemic on [youth mental health](#) and an increase in [violence against women](#). The long-term social and economic impact of COVID-19 will be significant, and will disproportionately affect those who are already in vulnerable situations.

Young people in and from care need our full support. A global pandemic is no time to force youth to make big life transitions, and no time to remove services and housing from those who need them most. Most governments agree and are working to extend moratoriums.

All levels of government must have a moratorium on youth transitions out of child welfare and commit to maintaining that moratorium until a plan is in place to ensure youth can make life transitions in safety, with dignity and respect.

We continue to call on all governments and on agencies serving young people in and from care to immediately implement the following four urgent measures:

- 1. Work with youth-in-care networks and our national partners to develop policy and practice guidelines for fully supported transitions out of care, into alternative government supports or into the community, as a condition to lifting moratoriums.**

During the pandemic, youth who have reached the age where they would transition out of care should have the option to remain in their current placements and receive supports – no files should be closed, nor should any services be withdrawn, including access to extended care workers and supports that would otherwise be conditional on being in school or in training. We thank those who have implemented moratoriums on transitions and urge Quebec and Nunavut to immediately implement a moratorium on youth aging out of care. The moratoriums that have been put into place offer governments the opportunity, without placing additional youth at risk, to redesign responses to transitions. We want to help.

2. Provide free accessible mental health services immediately, 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., comprehensive universal counselling services, psychologists, psychiatrists, Elders), in person (with proper precautions), using phone, online chat and video conferencing to maintain continuity of connections.

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 have been in care and those who choose to leave care in spite of moratoriums 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. Funds should be made accessible to youth who have been in 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 of placement abuse and intimate partner violence increases with physical distancing measures. Young people in and from care that are looking for alternative placements and safer housing arrangements should be protected. 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 be supported to create alternative arrangements, to ensure young people can remain housed. **No young person should be turned away from housing.**

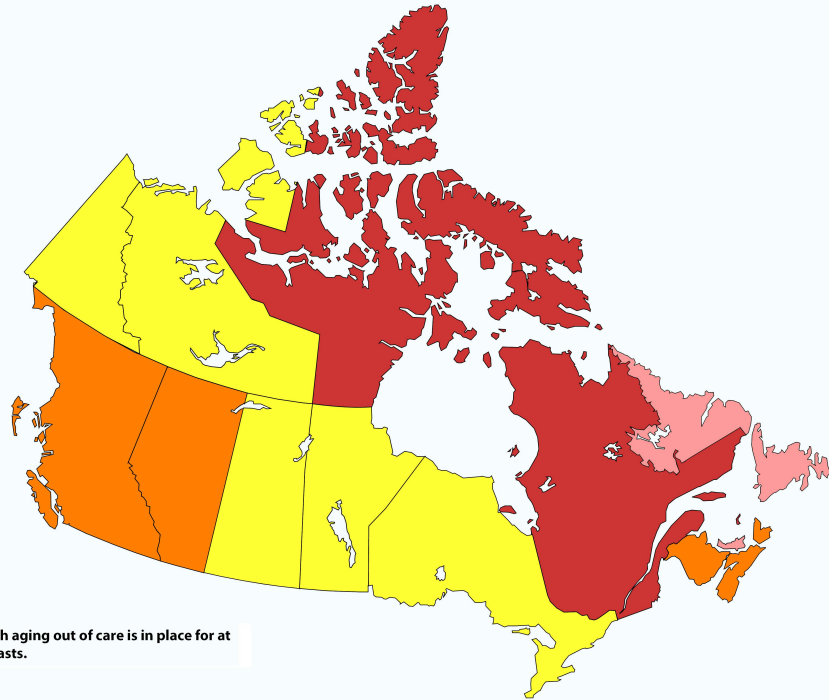
All governments should immediately suspend evictions if they haven’t done so already – many persons in and from the child welfare system may not have a safe or adequate ‘home’ to go to.

We thank youth-in-care alumni, frontline workers, families and advocates who are doing their part to protect and connect with young people in this uniquely vulnerable time. Please be transparent and clear about the supports and programs that youth can access. They are worried and need to know that we’ll be there for them.

Everyone can #StandWithYouthInCare. Please tag your provincial/territorial/federal elected representative on social media. Tell them that young people in child welfare deserve safe and supported transitions and ask them to work with youth-in-care networks to make it happen.

Provincial, territorial moratoriums on youth transitions out of child welfare

- None
- With set expiration date, within three months
- In perpetuity, until post pandemic
- Transitions have cautiously resumed in some cases
- Provinces and territories with comprehensive and universal protocol and policy for safe and supportive transitions out of child welfare



A federal moratorium for First Nations youth aging out of care is in place for at least 6 months, or as long as the outbreak lasts.

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Media contact:

To speak with leaders of youth-in-care networks, communicate with:

Rachel Gouin, Executive Director, Child Welfare League of Canada

Rachel@cwlc.ca

Tel. (613) 791-0361 (cell)

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 facilities 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 Advancement 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 well-being, 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.

Voices: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network provides support, encouragement, and advocacy for young people in and from care in Manitoba. We come alongside youth while they are in care, as they transition to in(ter)dependence, and as they grow into adults pursuing their goals. We are youth-driven and youth-focused. We raise awareness of the challenges youth in care face, educating the public and working with child welfare professionals to create a better system of care, in order to improve living conditions for children and youth who find themselves in alternative care, such as foster homes, group homes, and independent living programs.

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 pillars of youth development and policy advocacy to change systematic injustices. Fostering Change is supported by its youth volunteers, allies, stakeholders and First Call: BC's Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition.

Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society (VACFSS) is a Delegated Aboriginal Agency and leader in delivering culturally-grounded, restorative family services to urban Indigenous families. We offer a full spectrum of services encompassing Family Reunification and Preservation, Guardianship, Child Protection and Residential Resources. We strive to culturally and spiritually strengthen the families we serve, and our practice is guided by policy and research done in partnership with the communities we work alongside.

Our Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) was formed in 2010 to ensure that youth not only have a voice in their own care, but also in the larger care system that is designed to support them. YAC ensures that VACFSS holds a youth voice, and its policies and initiatives are informed by young people who have care experience. The committee is made up of young Indigenous leaders and advocates who speak on the inclusion of youth voice within the care system through the creation and amendment to policy, the development and implementation of cultural programming, and the promotion of the rights of children in care, among other initiatives.

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.

The Adoption Council of Canada is a national voice for adoption, unifying communities’ commitments to permanency for waiting children and youth. Our vision is a permanent, supported family for every waiting child and youth in Canada. As Canada’s only national, non-profit, charitable organization serving adopted persons, adoptive families, and birth families, we are focused on the need to raise awareness about the approximately 30,000 children and youth in government care across Canada who need permanent families (through kinship care, customary care, legal guardianship, and adoption).