

Q and A Director of Children's Services and Director of ALIGN. March 2020

Please note that the answers for these questions are a collaboration between the Director of Children's Services and Director of ALIGN. Remember information is changing on a day-to-day basis as we move through the pandemic, but we will do our very best to give you current accurate information. Please remember to use the Cs-ci-COVID-19@gov.ab.ca email address for your questions as CS is answering and tracking them.

1.Q: Can the sector be declared an essential service? If it were, then the staff that have sniffles and are staying home (isolating) would be able to come to work?

A: The sector is not being declared an essential service at this time. The priority demographic for this virus is seniors living situations and health care workers. That is something that we have put forth to Health and when we have an answer we will let you know. In terms of testing staff or young people, there may be a few more options available. A few days ago there was a TELUS app and other online services with doctors made available and pharmacists can assess for testing. We recognize that testing priorities exist and that youth are not the high risk demographic for the illness. People should also make sure that they are doing the self-assessment to ensure they are following the recommended protocol. It may be they do not need to be isolated, follow professional direction. The goal is to slow the COVID-19 virus down. The system will work if we follow the direction of our CMO and the guidelines on the website, but it does require patience and perseverance.

2.Q Alternative placements; what are the plans for immediate replacement? What about a quarantine; where will people go; what is the plan for planning- what have other countries done?

A: This is an AH and AHS responsibility and accountability. The Rapid Response Team for Group Care Sector that has come together is being asked to come up with a plan to address space for youth. Some possibilities we are looking at are schools, hotels.

3.Qa. Placements: can agencies say no to placement requests if they do not have the staffing capacity?

Some people have not been happy with this response. When an agency is not able to take the young person due to COVID-19 there appears to be an expectation that they must or have a duty.

3.Qb What is happening to have kids go home or to other placements i.e. foster care if they can?.

A: Group homes will still be asked to take young people. Please give the message when you need to refuse placement due to COVID-19 or staffing capacity "that all agencies are doing their best and will take young people when they can, but most are losing staff to sickness or isolation and need to replenish, everyone knows that it is a frustrating time. We all need to be kind to each other. We need to collectively ensure all our youth have a safe place and problem solve together.

B: The ministry is looking at ways to safely address bed capacity through all options.

4.Q Transportation of a high risk kid i.e., if a person is positive and is not isolating; or needs to be picked up ? How do the agencies do that, based on social distancing and the risk, is there an emergency service plan?

A: First off we need to be careful; what do we mean “high risk” – soon health will have a protocol involving Justice. The CMO was clear in the message the other day not to call 911 for this kind of issue – health is working on a process that may have more severe consequences for individuals testing positive but not isolating. In the meantime, discuss with the worker/supervisor or crisis unit. The Rapid Response Team will be developing a process/protocol to elevate concerns.

5.Q: Staffing – will there be any relaxing of the requirements like First Aid?

A: No staff need to have the requirements. Regarding staff who have First Aid that has expired we are asking for leniency, we will keep you posted. Using your imagination there are many people out of work that would be qualified and could step into help temporarily, like recreations workers, childcare centre workers, teachers, etc. who may be able to be extra support, house parent, cooks.

6.Q: Personal Protective Equipment-Shortage THIS IS GETTING TO BE A CRISIS. We need to have the protocol on what PPE is necessary and when?

A: We have a process in place with Nicole as a conduit for help. If you need equipment let her know at 1780 232-9199 she will send out a general note to see if any other agency can help. Nicole will also work with CS so that when a supply does become available through the ministry she can triage getting that to people. Protocol on what PPE is necessary and when is getting added to the practice guideline, hopefully approved this week.

7.Q: Despite Eldon’s best advocacy efforts, which I genuinely believe he has done with vigor, whose ear or ears do we need to bend to move our concerns forward and get the needle moving??

A: Children Services can only control what is in our sphere of influence. Rational thinking needs to be what we go by and even the Premier is following the CMO’s lead and recommendations. Health Services and the health experts provincially and nationally are triaging where resources go. Children’s Services has the best interest of children in mind and in times like this, we need to do our best to help each other.

8.Q: Do we have the right people around the Rapid Response table to provide the leveraged, practical solutions with the ability to bring this voice forward in planning?

A. Yes, the Rapid Response Team is made up of CS Executives, Agency Directors and ALIGN. As the COVID-19 Pandemic progresses through its stages the team will call on other subject matter experts as needed.

