

# Annex I

## ANNEX 1 - MEASURES TAKEN IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

As recognized in Canada's response to Question 2(A) of the list of issues, children have been impacted in various ways by the COVID-19 pandemic, and federal, provincial and territorial (FPT) governments have adopted numerous responsive measures that protect their rights in this time of crisis. This Annex highlights some of the measures adopted in specific areas, such as education, childcare, health, food and housing, and which are not already referred to in the response to Question 2(A). It also addresses specific measures taken to address the needs of children with disabilities and Indigenous children.

### Indigenous children

COVID-19 has further highlighted many pre-existing challenges faced by Indigenous children, particularly those who live in remote areas. FPT governments have been working with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities to support their immediate public health response, with the flexibility to address their specific needs through community-led solutions, while also identifying opportunities to provide longer-term support.

These responses are in line with the right of Indigenous children to enjoy their culture, religion and language as well as Canada's obligations under Article 2 to ensure that all children enjoy the rights in the Convention on an equal basis.

The Government of Canada provided financial support to help Indigenous early learning and childcare facilities safely operate during the pandemic, and provided funding to Indigenous communities to support a safe return for primary and secondary students to First Nations schools on reserve, including support for access to technology, purchase of e-learning software, the development of take-home learning materials, and support to schools undergoing required retrofits to follow public health guidelines.

The Government of Canada also provided funding to establish the Indigenous Community Support Fund to address immediate needs for Indigenous peoples, including support for Elders and vulnerable community members, measures to address food insecurity, educational and other support for children, mental health assistance and preparedness measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

New Brunswick developed specific supports and services for First Nations communities, including the establishment of a rapid response framework to ensure efficient testing; guides to assist with isolation plans in the event of an outbreak; biweekly trilateral meetings with Chiefs, Council members, federal government, and local stakeholders. It also developed processes to help First Nations communities order and receive personal protection equipment from the government.

Ontario identified gaps in services for First Nations students and developed options to address emerging and ongoing priorities. Ontario assessed First Nation connectivity needs to develop options for technical solutions and ensured the Rapid Response Northern Schools Team program was able to respond to requests from First Nations communities for crisis supports. Ontario also delivered sanitizing products to First Nations school partners.

Quebec granted specific funding to meet the needs of Indigenous shelters in communities under agreement and in urban settings, as well as centres offering services to First Nations and Inuit families.

Saskatchewan developed, through the support of the Ministry of Social Services, a series of podcasts developed by the First Nations University of Canada that profiles the importance of youth mental health and well-being during the pandemic.

### Children with disabilities

Recognizing that children with disabilities and their families were affected by the pandemic, FPT governments have worked to ensure that social services offered to children with disabilities continued without shortages or disruption, in line with Canada's obligations under Articles 2 and 23(1) of the Convention.

British Columbia provided a temporary COVID-19 Crisis Supplement from April to December 2020 for clients on Income Assistance or Disability Assistance who were not eligible for federal emergency support programs. This supplement was initiated to help support clients, including families with children, from encountering barriers during the pandemic. From January to March 2021, this temporary supplement was replaced by the British Columbia Recovery Supplement.

Manitoba adapted the Children's disABILITY Services and Child and Family Services to allow them to continue virtually wherever possible and also accommodated critical child safety-related in-person visits.

Nova Scotia's Disability Support Program implemented interim respite funding for participants of the Flex, Alternative Family Support, and Direct Family Support for Children programs to support families while school and day programs were closed.

Ontario expanded eligible expenses for programs that provide direct funding to support families of children with disabilities and adults with developmental disabilities. Under Ontario's COVID-19 Child Benefits, payments for children with special needs increased to help offset additional learning costs.

Prince Edward Island offered all public schools respite services to youth with special needs to mitigate the additional demands on families while schools were closed between March and June 2020. The AccessAbility Support Program worked closely with families to identify safe strategies and resources of essential one-to-one support and respite care, while its School Age Autism funding covered costs for virtual tutoring and weekly tutoring or teaching plans for parents to implement at home.

Saskatchewan's Ministry of Social Services provided a monthly COVID-19 respite benefit from June to September 2020 to caregivers of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

## Education

The pandemic has greatly disrupted access to schools across the country and provincial and territorial (PT) governments had to adapt quickly to ensure that children could continue to learn safely. Measures taken by PT governments balance children's right to education under Articles 28 and 29 with the need to ensure public health have included:

Alberta's school re-entry plan provides direction for school authorities for the return to school, while continuing to prioritize the protection of the health and safety of staff and students. Alberta announced additional funding to support literacy and numeracy for students impacted by the pandemic and for the 2021-2022 school year in COVID-19 mitigation funding, in combination with federal funding to address COVID-19 safety and operational needs. It also developed resource and guideline documents for school authorities, parents and guardians.

British Columbia implemented online learning until schools reopened in spring 2020. British Columbia also developed the Operation and Health & Safety Guidelines with public health officials and Kindergarten to Grade 12 partners to support a gradual return to in-class instruction.

Manitoba committed funding to augment staffing, health and safety, learning, and technology during school closures and established the Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre, which provides equitable access to the resources needed to support students, families and teachers in the remote learning environment to ensure continuity of learning.

New Brunswick provided laptops to all youth under the care of the Minister and youth within the Youth Engagement Services Program.

Nova Scotia established a COVID-19 Liaison team in fall 2020 to support administrators in public, private and Mi'kmaw schools in relation to the interpretation of Public Health Protocols.

The Northwest Territories developed a suite of Continuity of Learning Supports to support learning during school closures and created the Northwest Territories COVID-19 Health & Safety Guidelines for Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 (primary and secondary) Schools to provide guidance to schools for safe reopening. It also provided funding for the purchase of Chromebooks and turbo sticks to support equal access to at-home learning during primary and secondary school closures, particularly for students without regular access to technology.

In 2020, Ontario's Support for Families Program provided a one-time financial support for parents to purchase educational materials during school closures. Ontario also provided additional funding for school boards to hire more teachers to support physical distancing and effectively reduce class sizes by allowing school districts to purchase more laptops and tablets to support distance learning and launched online educational resources for students quarantined at home.

Prince Edward Island provided financial supports for families, including free basic school supplies, access to technology, respite support for students with various special needs, and mental health support. Prince Edward Island also transitioned and developed the capability for children attending public schools to virtual home-based learning for the duration of the 2019-2020 school year. Students returned to the classroom for the 2020-2021 school year.

Quebec added support staff and increased hours for complementary educational services for all students, including students with disabilities.

Saskatchewan provided schools contingency funding to ensure the safety of students and staff through the pandemic. Most of the funding was for enhanced sanitation and remote learning, furniture and equipment, and technology upgrades. Saskatchewan also developed guidelines and supports for school attendance and remote learning for children in care.

## Childcare

Childcare services were heavily disrupted during the pandemic and families with younger children faced new challenges, especially as working environments also sustained drastic changes. FPT governments had to develop new programs and to allocate new funding to respond to the evolving needs of Canadian parents and children and to ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care of younger children continued to conform to established standards.

The Government of Canada provided emergency pandemic financial support to provinces and territories for the childcare sector.

British Columbia invested in temporary emergency funding for the childcare sector in 2020 for licensed childcare facilities in receipt of Childcare Operating Funding, as well as Universal Childcare Prototype Sites, regardless of whether the facility remained open or chose to close temporarily.

Manitoba provided personal protective equipment and financial supports to service delivery agencies, including childcare centres, agencies serving people with disabilities, and child and family services agencies in recognition of their essential role. Operational grants were provided to childcare facilities to stay open.

New Brunswick provided childcare fee coverage and subsidies for qualifying parents who lost income due to COVID-19 and amended the provincial Emergency Measures Act to include provisions for opening emergency childcare facilities for essential workers.

The Northwest Territories introduced temporary pandemic funding supports during the 2020-21 fiscal year to support sustainability of the licensed early learning and childcare sector and access to childcare for essential workers. ,

Ontario mitigated impacts on the childcare sector by instituting new funding approaches including one-time direct payment programs for childcare providers, direct provision of personal protective equipment; and, establishing operation requirements and guidance for evidence-based health and safety protocols in childcare settings. Ontario also established fully subsidized emergency childcare programs to help front-line workers delivering critical services.

Prince Edward Island managed emergency childcare services of essential service workers who had no other alternatives during the pandemic.

Quebec created emergency childcare spaces for children who could be at risk during the lockdown, as well as for children who were monitored and referred by service workers. It also created a document promoting the mitigation of the impacts of COVID-19 on the development of children aged 0 to 5 years through the adaptation of public health practices with families and in living environments.

#### Mental and physical health

The pandemic has also had a significant impact on children and youth's physical and mental health. FPT governments made important investments to ensure the continuity of appropriate and high-quality health services and to ensure that children enjoyed the highest attainable standard of health, as per Article 24 of the Convention.

The Government of Canada launched the Wellness Together Canada online portal to provide free and confidential mental health and substance use supports accessible 24/7, including one-to-one counselling to children, in response to the unprecedented rise in mental health distress.

In support of children and youth, Alberta expanded Kids Help Phone, developed the COVID-19 Youth Mental Health Resource HUB, and created MoreGoodDays, a daily text messaging service for youth, focused on mental health and well-being.

New Brunswick identified mental health services as essential services required to be available from the beginning of the pandemic. All clinicians and service providers were provided the tools to ensure virtual care was accessible for children and youth. It also launched a service directory web site in 2020 which provides information and a list of available wellness and mental health resources, and further supported the Canadian Mental Health Association (New Brunswick) to develop COVID-19 specific resources for children, youth and families.

Nova Scotia launched a new mental health and addictions web site that contains information and links to variety of services and supports, including new e-mental health tools, the Kids Help Phone, Intake Services, and the Provincial Crisis Line.

The Northwest Territories started providing community counselling services by phone and virtually, eliminated community counselling waitlists, and provided telephone-based mental health programming to children and their families. It also made available oral health supplies to all NWT residents free of charge in the 2021 calendar year to mitigate the reduction in dental and oral health services resulting from the pandemic.

Prince Edward Island created a COVID-19 Kids Activity Book that was distributed throughout the Island to help explain the pandemic, normalize anxiety, and give kids some control over how to deal with their feelings. It further implemented virtual and e-health solutions, including a mental health and addictions information line and a virtual Child and Youth Urgent Mental Health Clinic.

Quebec implemented the Action plan: psychosocial services and mental health services in the context of COVID-19 (Officially: Plan d'action : services psychosociaux et services en santé mentale en contexte de

COVID-19), which recommended a series of concrete measures to provide an optimal response to the current psychosocial needs of the population, including children and young people.

Saskatchewan allocated funding to provide mental health services for students through the addition of positions such as family resources liaisons, wellness coordinators, community liaisons, social workers, psychologists and other mental health positions. It also released multiple media campaigns related to suicide prevention, connectedness during COVID-19, and mental health tips during the pandemic. Saskatchewan offered all school divisions grant funding for the 2020-2021 school year to provide training for their staff related to student safety and mental wellness and committed funding to offer Mental Health First Aid training to school divisions, with the intent to have at least one staff member trained in each school in all 27 school divisions. Finally, Saskatchewan integrated telephone support, virtual appointments and the use of social distancing and enhanced infection control protocols in publicly funded clinics to continue to meet the needs of children and their families.

#### Food and nutrition

Food insecurity increased in Canada during the pandemic, as many people became unemployed and had fewer resources to meet their basic needs such as food. In this context, PT governments developed new programs to ensure access to adequate food and nutrition, in line with Articles 24 and 27 of the Convention.

British Columbia redirected produce and milk from the School Fruit and Vegetable Nutritional Program to charitable food organizations and school meal programs in support of vulnerable families during in-class suspension in March and April 2020.

Manitoba implemented the Home Nutrition and Learning Program as a pilot to support families experiencing food disruption.

Nova Scotia established the COVID-19 Guidance: School Food to ensure that all students have access to food during the school day. School health promoters also continued to provide supports around outdoor education, enhancing physical activity opportunities, and continued access to Health Promoting Schools funds.

Prince Edward Island implemented a no-cost, home-delivered lunch program that provided one meal per day per school-aged children and to families who identified themselves as having a need.

Quebec implemented, in collaboration with community partners, emergency food assistance in the spring of 2020, that is, the purchase of food and beverages for kindergarten, primary-school, and secondary-school students who needed it, regardless of their socioeconomic situation.

#### Combatting homelessness and violence

During the pandemic, FPT governments adapted their housing policies, programs and services to assist families with children facing significant financial and other pressures with housing, and to ensure that persons experiencing homelessness could stay in safe environments and have access to supports and services (recognizing the right to adequate housing under Article 27). Further, in response to a surge of violence and abuse, many governments have adopted concrete measures to provide support to victims (in line with its obligations under Article 19 to protect children from violence, abuse and neglect).

The Government of Canada provided additional funding through Canada's Homelessness Strategy to help communities address the pandemic's impacts among people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including youth and families with children, as well as additional supports to the homeless-serving sector.

Manitoba suspended all non-urgent evictions until September 30, 2020 and provided an additional 20 units with supports for homeless youth.

New Brunswick suspended the authority of landlords to evict tenants for non-payment during the initial stages of COVID-19 (March to May 2020) in an effort to protect parents and households.

Nova Scotia worked closely with transition houses and homeless shelters to adapt to COVID-19 protocols, and established processes to expedite access to COVID-19 testing, arrange transport for testing and secure alternative spaces for isolation when needed. Nova Scotia ensured that the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners Program remained fully operational and trauma therapy services have been available virtually as well as in person.

Prince Edward Island instituted an eviction moratorium and temporary rental assistance benefit to support renters, including families, to maintain housing during the pandemic.

Quebec maintained telephone help lines and services, considered essential, for all victims of domestic violence.

#### Children under government care

To ensure the continuity of services and safety of children in government care, FPT governments have adapted their programs and funding for child and family services (in line with its obligations under Article 20).

The Government of Canada increased the Children's Special Allowances Program amount, which provides payments to FPT agencies and institutions that care for children to respond to pandemic-related needs.

British Columbia continued child and family services delivery and increased virtual service delivery as feasible, including provisions for youth and young adults set to transition from government care that enabled them to remain in their living arrangements longer, and provisions to extend support to youth on independent living and youth agreements.

New Brunswick continued providing support, beginning in April 2020, to children under Guardianship or Post-Guardianship who were about to age out of government care. It also increased monthly funding from November 2020 to March 2021 for youth in care of government living independently and it provided qualifying youth in care aged 16-19 additional funding through the Safe Restart Program to support expenditures related to COVID-19.

Nova Scotia offered extension of supports to youth who would otherwise be transitioning from child welfare during the pandemic. This has included financial supports, as well as extended counselling and transition planning.

The Northwest Territories brought forward a directive to allow the Director of Child and Family Services to extend the provision of services to youth (16-19) who would normally age out of care during the pandemic.

Prince Edward Island increased payments to foster parents for each child living full time in a foster home due to the increased costs associated with COVID-19 and provided respite rate increases.

Saskatchewan provided all foster care and extended family care providers with the enhanced Child Canada Benefit to help them with the added cost and pressures of COVID-19.

#### Additional financial supports for families and organizations supporting families

In addition to the financial supports for families highlighted in paragraph 8 of Canada's response, governments provided a number of other financial supports to families and organizations that supported families in exercising their responsibility for the care and upbringing of their children.

Manitoba extended supports and services to all young adults who would have transitioned out of the Manitoba Child and Family Services system. Youth were provided with continued placements, financial support and access to ongoing services.

New Brunswick instituted a moratorium on student loan repayment for students, and a one-time support benefit for students with a financial gap in meeting basic needs during the pandemic. New Brunswick also provided emergency financial support and ongoing guidance to sport and recreation organizations to allow them to continue to provide program opportunities to youth in a safe environment.

The Northwest Territories established a new one-time, short-term financial support to families that cannot get enough assistance from elsewhere.

Prince Edward Island provided funding to the United Way to operate the Atlantic Compassion Fund which funded a number of community organizations directly assisting children and families during the pandemic.