



ALBERTA
COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Office of the Minister

May 8, 2020

Dear Members of the Disability Community in Alberta:

As you are aware, we are dealing with a fast and rapidly changing landscape in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a government, we are committed to supporting people with disabilities, their families and the staff who work with them.

As Minister of Community and Social Services (CSS), I know the COVID-19 pandemic is an extremely challenging time for all Albertans. Every person in Alberta is facing unforeseen pressures related to accessing community services, buying what they need and staying connected with family and friends. COVID-19 is affecting Albertans practically, financially and emotionally.

We know the current situation is particularly hard for the people who rely on our programs and services for support. I want to reassure you we are committed to maintaining all CSS programs and services – including [Persons with Developmental Disabilities \(PDD\)](#), [Family Support for Children with Disabilities \(FSCD\)](#), [Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped \(AISH\)](#) and [Income Support](#) – during the pandemic. While in-person meetings have been temporarily postponed, ministry staff continue to support Albertans with disabilities and their families over the phone and online.

We are maintaining monthly AISH and Income Support rates, and making changes to ensure AISH and Income Support recipients who have lost work and income because of the COVID-19 pandemic can receive a portion of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. We encourage AISH and Income Support clients with an emergency need to contact their caseworker.

The [Alberta Supports](#) Contact Centre remains open, and people can reach staff in our local Alberta Supports offices by phone or email. Our staff are helping individuals, families and service providers by allowing them to be flexible within existing FSCD and PDD agreements to find ways to meet their needs during the pandemic. This includes allowing FSCD families and PDD Family Managed Services Administrators to reallocate funding towards alternative services that are available during the pandemic, expanding the pool of service providers, allowing the temporary hiring of a family member when no other supports can be accessed for PDD services, making it easier to renew agreements electronically and helping families find care for children or adults with disabilities. We will continue to adjust services based on individual and family needs, along with advice and [directives](#) from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and Alberta Health Services.

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Some of you, or your family members, may be in hospital because of COVID-19 or another issue. Alberta Health Services has updated guidelines to permit a family member or disability support worker to support patients with disabilities who are in hospital, including individuals with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities and/or Albertans with disabilities who have other challenges they may require assistance with. This new rule will help ensure those in need receive assistance while in hospital during this challenging time.

I know many of you have voiced concerns about the current situation, and I want to assure you that your concerns are being heard. My ministry is in daily contact with Inclusion Alberta and the Alberta Council of Disability Services to understand the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on Albertans with disabilities and their families. We have also been meeting weekly with the PDD Service Provider Partnership Committee to discuss COVID-19-related service delivery challenges.

I have participated in numerous conference calls with disability stakeholders, including service providers, community organizations, self-advocates and FASD Service Networks, to ensure they are up-to-date on our response efforts. In response to feedback from community partners, we have developed a plain language [COVID-19 information bulletin](#). Albertans living with disabilities and our disability community will be able to use this information as an easy reference and it will be available very soon.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation for front-line disability workers and disability service providers. Your dedication and leadership in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic to keep Albertans with disabilities safe and supported is exemplary and it makes me proud to be your Minister. Please know that my ministry is working with our partners in the disability sector to help them maintain these qualified staff so that Albertans with disabilities continue receiving the best support possible. All contracted service providers have pandemic plans in place and they are committed to following all public health orders that apply to them to keep Albertans with disabilities and those that support them as safe as possible.

Additionally, our government has been working hard to ensure that all staff who support Albertans with disabilities have the equipment they need to keep themselves and the Albertans they serve safe. We are also coordinating with Alberta Health Services to have masks available for workers assisting those with family managed disability services agreements with our FSCD and PDD programs. These are being distributed through our regional offices and where possible, through community partners, such as Inclusion Alberta.

The best thing you can do for your families and loved ones is to follow the [guidelines from Dr. Hinshaw](#), maintain physical distance, and wash your hands. Guidelines for use of personal protective equipment can be found [here](#). You can also [learn more](#) about how to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

If you are struggling with any feelings of anxiety, fear or isolation, you can call the [Mental Health Help Line](#), which is available 24-hours a day, seven days a week at 1-877-303-2642. For the latest up-to-date information on the pandemic, please visit www.alberta.ca/COVID19.

Albertans have a long and proud history of facing adversity with courage and compassion, and we will get through this together. I thank you for your commitment and dedication to Albertans in need.

Sincerely,



Rajan Sawhney
Minister of Community and Social Services