

New \$10-million pandemic staffing support benefit to support staffing in disability services, child care and child welfare ^[1]

Province ramping up additional supports, including COVID-19 Rapid Response Team: Stefanson

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Source: Government of Manitoba

Format: Press release

Publication Date: 18 Nov 2020

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Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

The Manitoba government will provide \$10 million for a new Pandemic Staffing Support Benefit to help address urgent staffing needs in the disability services, child-care and child welfare sectors, Families Minister Heather Stefanson announced today, while also highlighting a number of other initiatives in place for agencies that provide services to adults with disabilities.

“Thousands of children, vulnerable Manitobans and their families rely on the caring and dedicated staff in our disability services, child-care and child welfare sectors,” said Stefanson. “The COVID-19 pandemic is creating new staffing challenges, which are creating additional costs for agencies and facilities. This new \$10-million benefit is a flexible solution, helping ensure that we can continue providing quality services for vulnerable Manitobans during this unprecedented public health crisis.”

The benefit will be available to help address staffing challenges related to the pandemic including overtime costs, replacement staff, or paying for sick time. Funds could also support ongoing staffing costs if public health directs an early learning and child-care facility or a specific cohort to close for a short-term isolation period in response to a case of COVID-19.

Non-profit Community Living disABILITY Services residential home providers, child and family services group home providers and child-care centres are able to apply for this pandemic response benefit. If needed, the first installment will be provided up front, with subsequent payments based on an assessment of ongoing needs. Based on provincial projections and the number of the front-line staff in each sector, approximately \$6 million will be allocated to the disability sector, \$3 million to child care and \$1 million to child and family services from now until March 2021.

“Quality of life for adults with disabilities depends entirely on the quality of support available to them,” said Margo Powell, executive director, Abilities Manitoba. “We are grateful the province acknowledges the fragility and importance of our front-line workforce that currently supports over 5,000 people every day. Ready access to needed resources and the infusion of funds so non-profit agencies can respond as needed in these difficult times is appreciated and needed. We thank every front-line worker for their commitment to supporting people in such a trying time.”

The minister also highlighted a number of other new initiatives in place to support Manitobans with disabilities, their families and the agencies that support them. The province has created a COVID-19 rapid response team, which includes eight staff from Manitoba Families, ready to respond to calls for support from any of the 100 agencies serving adults with disabilities throughout Manitoba.

Beginning today, agencies that need additional on-site support, guidance from public health officials, or help with any other critical issues that might affect the care they provide to clients during the pandemic can call (toll-free) 1-866-906-0901. The team will staff the phone line 24-7, triage their call and help connect them with whatever assistance is needed. Further details will be shared with the sector in the coming days.

In recent weeks, the province has taken other steps to strengthen the supports available to the disability sector including hiring two pandemic response nurses to assist in the COVID-19 response. Their role includes:

- reviewing infection control protocols with service providers when a positive case has been identified,
- supporting contact tracing for service provider staff, and
- responding to questions regarding appropriate use of personal protective equipment.

“There are dozens of agencies across our province that have been dedicated to providing care, support and opportunities to Manitobans with disabilities throughout this pandemic, and they have been doing incredible work,” said Stefanson. “However, the spread of the virus means we must also step up our response, to help ensure agencies and the people they care for can be assured that we will be there when they need us. Our new rapid response team, pandemic response nurses and other initiatives will help protect some of our most vulnerable

citizens and the people who support them.”

To date, Manitoba Families has invested more than \$3 million in personal protective equipment for its sectors including masks, gowns, eye protection, gloves and hand sanitizer. More than 192,000 reusable masks have also been distributed to early learning and child-care, child welfare, housing and disability services clients and agencies.

The minister noted these initiatives complement regular, ongoing communication with the disability, child welfare and child-care sectors including webinars with public health officials and other partners. For more information, visit www.gov.mb.ca/fs/covid-circulars.html. [3]

More information about the Pandemic Staffing Support Benefit, including eligibility criteria and application forms, is being distributed today and will be posted online at www.gov.mb.ca/fs/pandemic-staffing-support-benefit.html. [4]

The Manitoba government is taking strong action to protect Manitobans and ensure timely access to care. For more information on COVID-19 in Manitoba, visit www.manitoba.ca/COVID19 [5].

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