National Council of Youth in Care Advocates

March 11, 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A Year Out and Youth are Still "Aging Out"

Ottawa, Ont. – When the pandemic was declared in March 2020, 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 the child protection system at the age of majority. Some provinces and territories took temporary measures to ensure youth could keep benefiting from services and supports they would otherwise have lost due to age-based cut-offs.

Some of those moratoriums are expiring soon and there are still places in Canada where young people are being forced to transition out of care into independence during a global pandemic.

The pandemic is having devastating impacts on children and youth. Not only is COVID-19 affecting the already fragile economic situation of lower-income families, it is also taking a heavy toll on young people's mental health. Job and housing insecurity, lack of connections to peers and anxiety about the future are only some of the reasons young people have been feeling distressed.

The thought of being forced to leave care during a pandemic can significantly increase distress and propel young people into situations that are risky for their health and well-being.

All governments should have a moratorium in place and commit to maintaining a halt to youth transitions out of child welfare until a plan is in place to ensure youth are only making life transitions when they are ready and fully supported to do so.

We were pleased to see Ontario and British Columbia take the lead. Ontario has extendied moratoriums until March 2022 and went a step further, actively cooperating with lived experts and advocates to transform the current system. British Columbia has two interim COVID measures. Temporary Housing Agreements have been extended until March 2022 and Agreements with Young Adults life skills programming and cultural supports, will expire on September 31st 2021. All governments must follow suit if they intend to protect young people.

As we approach the one year mark into the pandemic, we continue to call on all governments and on agencies who are serving young people in care to clearly communicate the existence of moratoriums to young people in the system. Based on the feedback we have received by youth in and from care throughout the country, we know that many youth are still being forced to exit care before they are ready; and in the middle of a global pandemic.

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

One year ago, we called on governments to implement the following urgent measures. They are still needed and they are worth repeating:

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 – we urge governments to renew moratoriums or to declare moratorium where there are none. 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 child welfare and offer additional supports required for their survival, with no eligibility criteria or conditions attached.**

   Youth who have been in child welfare and those who choose to leave the system 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 youth who were in child welfare, 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.

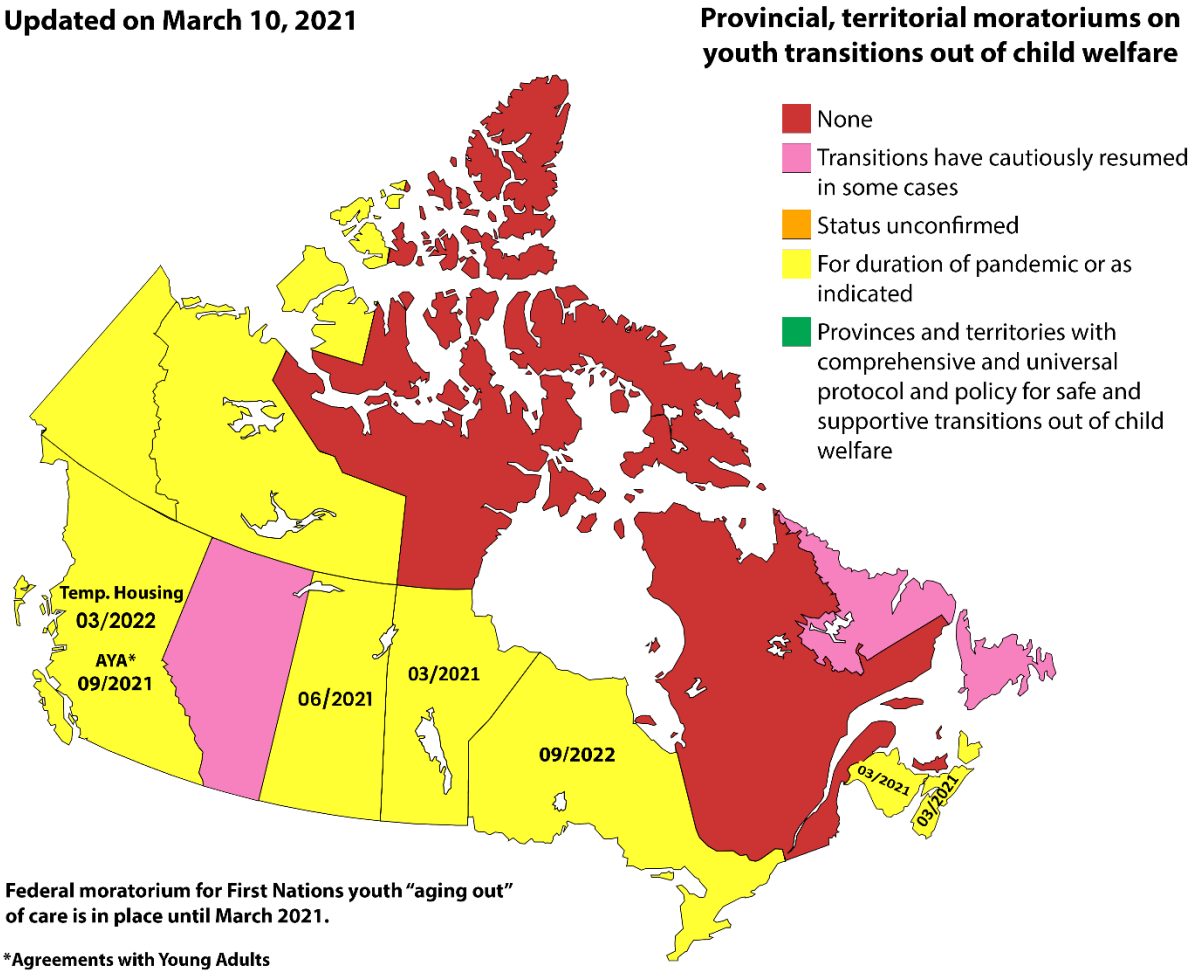
4. **When young people come to you seeking housing and services, do not turn them away.**

   The risk of placement abuse and intimate partner violence increases with physical distancing measures. Young people in and from child welfare 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 protection system may not have a safe or adequate ‘home’ to go to.

Everyone can #StandWithYouthInCare. Please communicate with your provincial, territorial or federal elected representative and tell them that young people in child welfare deserve safe and supported transitions. And ask them to work with lived experts to make it happen.

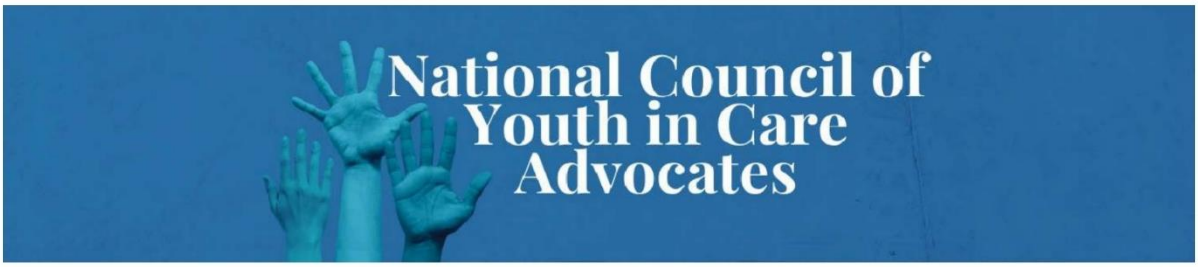


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The National Council of Youth in Care Advocates is comprised of provincial and territorial advocates, Youth in Care Networks, youth in care alumni and key allies. We first convened as a national group in March 2020 to collectively call upon provinces and territories to issue moratoriums on 'aging out' of care during the COVID-19 pandemic.



CWLC LBEC
Child Welfare League of Canada
Ligue pour le bien-être de l'enfance du Canada

New Brunswick Youth in Care Network
Réseau des Jeunes pris en charge du Nouveau-Brunswick

Adoption Council of Canada
Conseil d'adoption du Canada

Youth in Care Canada
Jeunes pris en charge Canada

MYCASA
Montreal Youth in Care Alumni Student Association

Voices
Manitoba's Youth In Care
"Empowering Youth"

OCAC
Ontario Children's Advancement Coalition

Care Jeunesse

A Way Home
Vers un chez-soi

VACFSS
Our Children, Our Future
Our Responsibility

fostering CHANGE

firstcall
BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

syicen
for youth by youth