

Voluntary Care Agreement vs Special Needs Agreements

This document provides a detailed comparison of the two main legal agreements used by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) in British Columbia: the Voluntary Care Agreement (VCA) and the Special Needs Agreement (SNA).

This toolkit outlines their fundamental differences, similarities, and practical considerations to help families understand their options.

VCA



Voluntary Care Agreement (VCA)

The Voluntary Care Agreement (VCA) is a legal agreement between the parent/guardian and MCFD that places a child in temporary care when the parent is unable to care for the child due to a temporary situation (e.g., illness, crisis).

Parental Rights: Parent retains full guardianship and can end the agreement at any time with written notice (usually 24 hours).

SNA



Special Needs Agreement (SNA)

A Special Needs Agreement is a legal agreement between the parent/guardian and MCFD where a child is placed in care because of the child's special needs (e.g., significant physical, mental, or developmental disabilities).

Parental Rights: Parent retains guardianship; termination of the agreement may require care planning for transition.



Practical Considerations

- **VCA:** Used for temporary crises (e.g., hospitalization, family emergency) when no disability is involved.
- **SNA:** Designed for children with ongoing, complex medical or developmental needs requiring specialized care.
- Both agreements are funded by MCFD and include planning meetings.
- SNAs typically require a detailed Individualized Service Plan (ISP) due to the complexity of needs.

Key Differences Between VCA and SNA

ASPECT	VOLUNTARY CARE AGREEMENT (VCA)	SPECIAL NEEDS AGREEMENT (SNA)
Primary Reason	Parent's temporary inability to care (e.g., illness, crisis)	Child's disability/special needs require specialized care
Target Population	Any child under 19 needing temporary care	Children under 19 with significant disabilities/special needs
Length of Agreement	Up to 6 months at a time	Up to 1 year at a time; renewable
Underlying Issue	Parent's circumstance is the main driver	Child's condition is the main driver
Intended Outcome	Reunification after temporary issue is resolved	Ongoing specialized care for complex needs
Legal Section	Section 5 CFCSA	Section 8 CFCSA
Type of Care	Foster care or out-of-home care	Specialized care (e.g., medical foster home, group home)

Similarities Between VCA and SNA

- Both are voluntary agreements: Parents must consent.
- Parents retain legal guardianship and decision-making authority.
- Both apply to children under 19 years of age.
- Parents are involved in care planning and reviews.
- Parents can request to terminate the agreement (VCA typically easier to end immediately).
- MCFD retains legal responsibility for care and placement while agreements are in effect.



Resources & Contacts

Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)

www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/technology-innovation/contact-us

Representative for Children and Youth BC: rcybc.ca

Family Support Institute of BC: familysupportbc.com

Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA):

www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96046_01