

Voluntary Care Agreement vs Special Needs Agreements

There are various types of Care Agreements for children used by MCFD. This toolkit outlines Voluntary Care and Special Needs Agreements. Please visit our other Toolkit pages for further resources.

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



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).



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

- You may be required to pay support to the ministry if your income is high enough
- CCB and tax credits will be suspended during the care agreement
- Be mindful of eligibility of supported housing when children are in care
- Both VCAs and SNAs 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)

Rights under either VCA or SNA

- They are voluntary agreements: Parents must consent.
- Parents retain legal guardianship and decision-making authority.
- Family/Child has the right to maintain cultural identity, language, and ties to community.
- You are to receive regular updates and visitation.
- 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

[Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies](#) are located across the province. They administer care agreements for the unique needs of Indigenous communities.

Representative for Children and Youth BC: rcybc.ca

Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA):

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

Family Law in BC <https://www.familylawinbc.ca/children/child-protection/making-agreements-your-childs-care>