

## Consolidated Appropriations Act Frequently Asked Questions

### Q: What is the Consolidated Appropriations Act?

A: President Donald Trump signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (CAA), Public Law 116-260, into law on December 27, 2020. The CAA provides federal funding for states operating an IV-E Child Welfare Agency to offer flexibilities and assistance to young adults who have aged out or are aging out of foster care during the COVID-19 pandemic. This act also provides supplemental appropriations and additional requirements for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood that includes the Education Training Voucher program.

The CAA continues safe operation of child welfare programs, support for young adults between the ages of 19-26, and prevents aging out of foster care during the pandemic.

- An IV-E Child Welfare Agency may not require youth to leave foster care solely due to age before October 1, 2021;
- States are required to provide re-entry to foster care for young adults who aged out during the pandemic (January 27, 2020, through September 30, 2021). States must facilitate the re-entry process;
- States may not find a youth ineligible for IV-E foster care maintenance payments due to age or due to failure to meet educational and employment conditions;
- Young adults can remain IV-E eligible even if they are not able to meet the education and employment conditions before October 1, 2021, as long as they meet all other IV-E requirements;
- States must provide notice of the option to reenter foster care to each youth who aged out of foster care during the COVID-19 public health emergency;
- States must continue to follow all requirements related to permanency and transitional planning; and,
- Assist former foster care young adults with supportive services during the pandemic.

### Q: How is the Division of Children and Family Services (CFS) planning to meet the requirements of the CAA?

A: CFS will be implementing the following:

- Pandemic Foster Care Program;
- Additional funding for tuition and educational debt for young adults participating in the Education and Training Voucher Program; and,
- Pandemic Supportive Service through the Connected Youth Initiative which replicates the Pandemic Foster Care Program.

### Q: What is Pandemic Foster Care?

A: The Pandemic Foster Care Program assists young adults who have successfully exited out of the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Program due to turning age 21 between January 27, 2020, and September 30, 2021. Young adults may receive similar support they received while in B2i such as case management and a monthly financial stipend.



## Q: What is the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program?

A: The creation of the ETV Program is to provide financial assistance for post-secondary training and education to youth who have aged out of foster care or who have left foster care at age 16 through kinship, guardianship, or adoption.

## Q: What is Pandemic Supportive Services through Connected Youth Initiative (CYI)?

A: CYI will provide a supportive service that will replicate the Pandemic Foster Care Program by providing a monthly stipend and coaching through Central Plains to those young adults who successfully exited out of B2i due to turning age 21 between January 27, 2020, and September 30, 2021.

## Q: What is the difference between Pandemic Foster Care and Pandemic Supportive Services through CYI?

A: Both the CFS provided Pandemic Foster Care Program and Central Plains provided Pandemic Supportive Services through CYI will provide a monthly stipend and case management to eligible clients. The main difference between the programs is which agency is providing case management-type services. The State's Pandemic Foster Care Program will have case management provided by CFS while Central Plains will also provide Pandemic Supportive Services through CYI. Clients can choose either program based on what will best meet their needs.

## Signing Up for Pandemic Foster Care Program

### Q: How does a young adult qualify for Pandemic Foster Care?

A: A young adult must have exited B2i at age 21 between January 27, 2020, and September 30, 2021. Young adults who were terminated from the B2i program before they turned 21 are not eligible for Pandemic Foster Care.

### Q: How does a young adult sign up for Pandemic Foster Care?

A: Young adults can begin signing up on July 1, 2021. A young adult will confirm participation with a CFS representative when the CFS Representative calls them to inquire about their desire to participate in Pandemic Foster Care. The young adult will schedule a time to sign the Voluntary Service and Support Agreement (VSSA) agreeing to voluntarily enter into Pandemic Foster Care with the CFS representative who reaches out to them. A VSSA needs to be signed for services to start. If a young adult has not heard from CFS about the Pandemic Foster Care Program and questions if they qualify they can send an email to [dhhs.pandemicfostercare@nebraska.gov](mailto:dhhs.pandemicfostercare@nebraska.gov). If the young adult chooses to receive services through CYI, the CFS representative will make a referral for the young adult to initiate services.

### Q: How will young adults be notified about Pandemic Foster Care?

A: CFS will notify individuals who may be eligible for Pandemic Foster Care via mailed letters and follow-up phone calls. Additional contact may also be made through text and email. If a young adult does not hear from CFS, they can email Pandemic Foster Care program staff at [dhhs.pandemicfostercare@nebraska.gov](mailto:dhhs.pandemicfostercare@nebraska.gov).

### Q: How soon after they are contacted by CFS can eligible young adults sign up?

A: Young adults can sign up any time before September 30, 2021. However, a participant may have additional financial support if they sign up before July 31, 2021.

## Q: What if a young adult does not have their former B2i Independence Coordinators' information?

A: A young adult will not need their former B2i Independence Coordinator's contact information. CFS will be contacting all young adults who qualify for Pandemic Foster Care by mail, phone, and text. Young adults can also send an email to [dhhs.pandemicfostercare@nebraska.gov](mailto:dhhs.pandemicfostercare@nebraska.gov).

## Q: How does a young adult sign the VSSA?

A: The CFS Representative who contacts the young adult will discuss options regarding how to get the VSSA signed. The VSSA can be signed in person (if requested by the young adult) or through electronic signature through an electronic App called DocuSign.

## Q: If the B2i participant lives out of state, can they enter Pandemic Foster Care?

A: Yes, if a young adult aged out of Bridge to Independence and is currently living out of state, they may qualify for Pandemic Foster Care. However, if they elect to participate in Nebraska Pandemic Foster Care, they would not be eligible to receive the same federal funding from the state they are residing in.

## Participation in the Program

### Q: What services or support will a young adult receive in Pandemic Foster Care?

A: The Pandemic Foster Care Program will offer the following services and supports:

- Monthly Stipend: Qualifying participants will receive a monthly stipend. This stipend is equivalent to the amount provided to young adults in the Bridge to Independence Program. Young adults may qualify for retroactive payments back to December 27, 2020, if they turned 21 before this date.
- Case Management Services: Services and supports through transitional living planning, approval of current living arrangements, and identification of resources as needed or requested.

### Q: What are the requirements for a young adult in the program?

A: To enter into the program, young adults are required to sign the VSSA form. Immediately after a young adult signs the VSSA, they will begin receiving services and support.

Each young adult in the program will be in contact with an Independence Coordinator at least once a month, either virtually or by telephone. Face-to-face meetings may be arranged as well.

Participants will work with their assigned Independence Coordinator on a transitional living plan, which will focus on the participants' personal goals and steps to achieve them in the few months following the start of the program.

The participant's housing situation will be reviewed and will need to be approved unless it had been approved as part of the B2i program.





**Q: Does a participant need to have their housing approved to qualify for Pandemic Foster Care?**

A: Yes. The participant's housing needs to be approved for a young adult to enter into Pandemic Foster Care Program. If the young adult lives in the same residence in which they resided while in B2i and it has already been approved, they are exempt from this approval process.

If a participant moves while being enrolled in Pandemic Foster Care Program, housing is required to be approved by CFS.

**Q: When will participants receive their monthly stipend and how will stipends be received?**

A: Participants must sign up before July 31, 2021, to receive retro payments dating back to December 27, 2020, or their 21st birthday if they turned 21 after December 27, 2020. Participants should receive their first payment within 10 business days of signing the VSSA. Ongoing monthly payments will be processed before the 10th of every month. Individuals receiving stipends can choose to have the payment direct deposited into their account or placed on a Relia card.

**Q: What if a participant does not have their Relia card any longer?**

A: With the assistance of a CFS worker, when participants sign up for Pandemic Foster Care, they can submit their current information and preference of payment method.

**Q: Will a young adult receive the same Independence Coordinator the young adult had in B2i Program?**

A: CFS understands the value of maintaining relationships. However, CFS cannot guarantee that a young adult will be assigned to their previous Independence Coordinator.

**Q: Do education or employment participation and verification need to be provided to remain in the program?**

A: No. When the VSSA is signed, young adults will be asked to confirm whether they are currently attending school or employed. The main purpose of gathering such information is to assist with future planning for the participant.

**Q: Can a young adult be terminated from Pandemic Foster Care?**

A: Yes. If a young adult becomes incarcerated or committed to a residential treatment program by the court, they will be terminated from the program.

## **Pandemic Support through Connected Youth Initiative**

**Q: How will participants be notified about the additional support provided by Connected Youth Initiative?**

A: CFS is launching a public awareness campaign through social media, the DHHS website, and printed material. Additionally, information will be provided to the Connected Youth Initiative to share with young adults. When the CFS representative reaches out the young adult will be asked if they would like to receive services through CFS for Pandemic Foster Care or through Great Plains.



**Q: Who is eligible for additional support provided by Independent Living Supports and Services?**

A: Young adults between the ages of 19-26 (up to their 27th birthday) who were in foster care at age 14 or older.

**Q: Does the additional financial support for Pandemic Foster Care and ETV end on 9/30/21?**

A: Funding will still be available after September 30, 2021; however, after September 30, 2021, the allowed flexibility on age requirements will end, and the maximum age for the ETV program will be age 26.

**Q: If a young adult begins to receive services and support, but turns 27 before September 30, will they be able to continue receiving services until 9/30/21?**

A: No. Once a young adult turns 27, all services and support through Chafee will end.

## **Education and Training Voucher Program**

**Q: How will young adults be notified about additional support with ETV?**

A: Central Plains, who administers the Education Training Voucher (ETV) program, will contact young adults in the ETV Program regarding any additional support that becomes available. Participants can reach out to [flongoria@central-plains.org](mailto:flongoria@central-plains.org) with questions.

**Q: What additional supportive services will a young adult receive in the ETV Program due to CAA?**

A: Participants will receive additional tuition funding for the 2021 fall semester. Young adults who have past debt that caused a suspension in re-entering post-secondary school may qualify for financial assistance.

**Q: If a young adult is not currently participating in ETV, how do they sign up?**

A: Individuals aged 17 and older who have not attained their 27th birthday can reach out to Central Plains. For updated information and application for ETV Program go to: [www.central-plains.org/etv.html](http://www.central-plains.org/etv.html).

**Q: CAA expands the age eligibility for ETV, does this mean a young adult can receive ETV services for more than five years?**

A: No

## **Miscellaneous Questions**

**Q: Does a young adult have to pay income tax on any of the money received through this new law?**

A: No these funds are not considered taxable.



**Q: Will the additional funds obtained through Pandemic Foster Care affect Medicaid benefits?**

A: Medicaid is currently following CARES Act guidance. This guidance will remain in effect until the end of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE). Please contact 800-383-4278 regarding Medicaid questions or log in to “My Account” at <https://dhhs.ne.gov/pages/accessnebraska.aspx>.

**Q: If a family entered into a Subsidized Adoption Assistance agreement or Guardianship Assistance agreement, can the subsidy be extended through the CAA?**

A: No. CAA did not expand the authority to extend adoption assistance or guardianship assistance payments.

**Q: If a family entered into a subsidized adoption Assistance agreement or Guardianship Assistance agreement can the young adult enter Pandemic Foster Care?**

A: No, because the young adult has not aged out of foster care.

**Q: Can a young adult receive services from the Connected Youth Initiative and Pandemic Foster Care?**

A: A young adult cannot accept Pandemic Foster Care and receive the same monthly Pandemic Support Services from CYI. However, a young adult can benefit from other services that CYI offers (i.e. Needs-Based Funds, Central Navigation, and Opportunity Passport). More information can be found at <https://www.nebraskachildren.org/what-we-do/connected-youth-initiative/>.