



Accountability Report 2022–23

Community Services



Table of Contents

Accountability Statement	2
Measuring Performance.....	3
Priority Areas in 2022-23:	3
A. Establish a five-year target for the reduction of childhood poverty	3
B. Enhance both the short- and long-term model for supportive housing	3
C. Provide services under the Disability Support Program, Child and Family Wellbeing Program and Employment Support and Income Assistance Program that support vulnerable children, families, and individuals:.....	4
Disability Support Program (DSP)	4
Child and Family Wellbeing Program (CFW).....	5
Employment Support and Income Assistance Program (ESIA).....	6
Service delivery	6
Strengthened relationships with African Nova Scotian and African Canadian Communities	6
D. Child and Youth Commission	7
Status of Women Office.....	8
Status of Women Priority Areas in 2022-23:	8
A. Continue to encourage women’s participation in leadership.....	8
B. Explore initiatives to strengthen women’s economic security	8
C. Ensure women and their children are safe from gender-based violence.....	8
Financial Results	10
<i>Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act</i>	11

Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of the Department of Community Services for the year ended March 31, 2023, is prepared pursuant to the *Finance Act* and government policies and guidelines. The reporting of the Department of Community Services outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments and opinions by the Department of Community Services management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of the Department of Community Services management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the Department of Community Services 2022-23 Business Plan.

Original signed by:

Honourable Karla MacFarlane, Minister of Community Services and Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act and Status of Women Office

Tracey Taweel, Deputy Minister of Community Services

Measuring Performance

The mandate of the Department of Community Services (DCS) is to provide effective supports and assistance for people in need so they can live more independent and healthier lives. The Department has three core business areas: Employment Support and Income Assistance, Child and Family Wellbeing, and the Disability Support Program. The Department is also responsible for the Status of Women Office.

The Department of Community Services is guided by the following outcomes:

- Nova Scotians will be supported to have more control over their own lives;
- Nova Scotians will be better able to meet their basic needs;
- Nova Scotians will be safe and supported through prevention and early intervention;
- Nova Scotians will be more included in their communities;
- Employment and income supports will be proactive, practical, and targeted;
- Programs and services will be delivered more efficiently; and
- Strengthened relationships with African Nova Scotian and African Canadian communities.

Priority Areas in 2022-23:

A. Establish a five-year target for the reduction of childhood poverty

The Department of Community Services convened seven tables each focused on a different aspect of child poverty. Sixteen provincial departments, guided by more than 50 experts, worked together to explore solutions for this complex problem. Recommendations arising from this work form the foundation to a targeted approach to address child poverty in Nova Scotia.

B. Enhance both the short- and long-term model for supportive housing

The Department of Community Services received approval to implement Nova Scotia's first Supportive Housing Approach to address homelessness. The approach was developed in partnership with service providers, the Office of Addictions and Mental Health and the departments of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Justice, and Health and Wellness. \$11.4 million was invested in 2022-23 to establish a Supportive Housing Program and expand the Emergency Shelter Program, as well as prevention-based diversion funding.

Supportive Housing and Emergency Shelters:

The Department of Community Services funds 521 supportive housing units in Nova Scotia, with 319 created in 2022-23 alone. The Department also funds 12 emergency shelters (252 beds), with 114 beds added in 2022-23. This work has relied on numerous partnerships, such as with the Government of Canada, provincial departments, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia and with valued service provider partners across the province. Work in 2022-23 included:

- Creation of new permanent supportive housing units and wraparound supports for high acuity homeless individuals (The Overlook);
- Expansion of culturally responsive housing and wraparound supports, such as:
 - the Diamond Bailey Healing Centre for urban Indigenous people;
 - supportive housing for African Nova Scotian males experiencing homelessness;
- Creation of transitional supportive housing for people exiting corrections;
- Additional funding to emergency shelters across the province; and

- Expanded funding and supports to rural shelters to stabilize and professionalize staff operations, bolster housing support services, and provide emergency winter shelters and emergency hoteling when shelters are at capacity.

77 Housing Support Workers are embedded in community agencies throughout the province. They provide a broad spectrum of client-centered support to prevent eviction, make connections to housing and maintain housing for individuals and families who are homeless or at-risk of being homeless.

Diversion Supports:

\$780,000 in funding was provided to non-profit service providers across the province for one-time funding for items to support eviction prevention and to secure housing, such as damage deposits and utility bills.

The Department of Community Services collaborated with Adsum for Women and Children and Welcome Housing Support Services to support individuals and families at risk of homelessness in HRM. Additionally, DCS worked with the Journey Home Program, 902 Man Up and the Association of Black Social Workers to provide culturally responsive eviction prevention supports to African Nova Scotian families at risk of homelessness.

C. Provide services under the Disability Support Program, Child and Family Wellbeing Program and Employment Support and Income Assistance Program that support vulnerable children, families, and individuals:

Disability Support Program (DSP)

The Disability Support Program and the Disability Rights Coalition participated in a collaborative engagement process in 2022-23 to develop a jointly endorsed agreement to remedy findings of systemic discrimination in the delivery of supports under the *Social Assistance Act*. This agreement was informed by an independent report filed on February 6, 2023. Given the focus on the remedy and the potential impacts to the disability support system, DCS has paused the planning of the review of the *Homes for Special Care Act*.

Improvements continue to be made to allow participants more choice and independence in their lives. Forty-nine residents of large residential facilities were supported to move into community. The Disability Support Program piloted a new service provider selection process, giving participants leaving an institution the choice in their service providers and where and with whom they live. A new initiative in 2022, My Days, also provides opportunities for people to choose how they want to spend their time as part of community living, including individualized supports and community offerings in areas of employment, volunteering, and recreation. The Department of Community Services removed the cap on the number of participants accessing the Independent Living Support (ILS) Program, enabling Nova Scotians with disabilities to receive supports while living on their own. 572 individuals total (55 new to the program) were supported through ILS in 2022-23 (with 178 new participants accepting offers to participate in ILS).

The Disability Support Program expanded the Direct Family Support for Children and the Enhanced Family Support for Children, giving families more funding for respite services to support children with disabilities living at home. As of March 31, 2023, there were 633 families (674 children) receiving respite.

The Department of Community Services collaborated with Seniors and Long-term Care to implement the Shared Services Pilot Program, which offers the opportunity for four individuals with physical disabilities to live in a shared rented living space in community while receiving the disability and health-related supports they need. The overall goal of the program is to support Nova Scotians who might otherwise require placement in long-term care to live the life they choose in community, to move away from facility living arrangements, and to support community integration and inclusion.

Child and Family Wellbeing Program (CFW)

The Department of Community Services completed year two of its three-year redesign of the foster care program. A new recruitment and retention strategy is ongoing to increase the number of foster caregivers, including those from diverse backgrounds. Hub homes are being piloted in rural Cape Breton and in the Preston Township area.

A new Practice Framework for supporting children, youth and families was implemented. The Framework is rooted in reflective practice and was developed with a focus on Africentric and Indigenous approaches, with the child and family at the centre of every decision. Work also began on significant revisions to policies to support the Framework.

2022-23 marked the government's completion of its three-year investment of \$11 million in prevention and early intervention, bringing the total investment to \$17.4 million on an ongoing basis. The Cultural Connectors program, which supports strong community engagement with African Nova Scotian families was expanded. Similarly, expansions were made to Parenting Journey, a home visitation program that provides holistic support for families experiencing complex challenges.

Following the end of the practice of birth alerts in November 2021, DCS and Mi'kmaw Family & Children's Services (MFCS) implemented a preventative approach to connect expectant parents and families with voluntary and culturally appropriate supports. The Department of Community Services also continued to apply an Indigenous lens to policy, program, and service delivery practices, in line with the Federal legislation *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families*. The Department of Community Services staff participated in cultural humility training to support their work with Indigenous children and families and continued to support negotiations for Indigenous self-governance to inform the development of Mi'kmaw child and family wellbeing legislation. Staff and Jordan's Principle Coordinators met regularly to discuss service delivery improvements for Indigenous children, youth, and families.

The Alternative Family Care monthly payment was increased to \$750 per child to help extended family members and others meet the needs of children who are at risk of coming into the care of the Minister.

The Child and Family Wellbeing Program has implemented several strategies to address sexual exploitation and human trafficking related to children in care in Nova Scotia. Over 500 social workers, foster caregivers, and Child and Youth care program staff have received training to increase their awareness and understanding of trafficking and youth sexual exploitation.

The *Adoption Records Act* and supporting regulations came into full effect in spring 2022 to provide direction with respect to how adoption information requests will be handled by DCS. In 2022-23 over 900 requests were made to the Adoption Disclosure Program.

The Department of Community Services began planning for the next mandated review of the *Children and Family Services Act*, with results to be published publicly by March 1, 2025.

Employment Support and Income Assistance Program (ESIA)

The Department of Community Services began exploring a new case management model to enable a more preventative and holistic response to the needs of ESIA clients. A multi-year project, Elevate ESS (Employment Support Services), also began to improve client program participation and employment outcomes.

Breaking the cycle of intergenerational dependency on Income Assistance is a priority for DCS. To that end, ESIA worked to expand employment and skills development services for youth from low-income households. In partnership with community service providers, approximately 1300 youth participated in a range of programs, including the EDGE program, Youth Development Initiative, Career Rising, Educate to Work for Dependents, Inspiring Success, and the Immigrant Youth Career Exploration Program.

In line with Nova Scotia's Action for Health, which recognizes food security as a social determinant of health, DCS has worked horizontally with government and community partners to address food insecurity. Funding was provided to establish Community Food Network pilots in Eskasoni First Nation and Preston Township. Feed Nova Scotia, food banks and family resource centres also received funding to improve food security across the province, including specific initiatives to address COVID-19 pandemic-related food security issues. A total of \$3.6 million was invested in 2022-23.

The Department of Community Services continues to work with partners to explore new transportation pilot sites and opportunities for expansion that enhance access to transportation to individuals experiencing low-income, with an emphasis on rural communities.

In July 2022, DCS increased the Nova Scotia Child Benefit by \$12.5 million, reaching 22,488 families or 40,392 children in 2022.

The Employment Support and Income Assistance Program worked with GEO Nova Scotia, a non-profit organization founded in 2022 that aims to address the digital divide facing low-income Nova Scotians. GEO coordinates a growing network of partners who connect individuals and families with devices and internet access to ensure accessibility of on-line services. This work is in line with Action for Health, expanding access to virtual services for low-income Nova Scotians.

Service delivery

The Department of Community Services made investments to enable clients to access services digitally and to improve how service providers connect with the department and clients.

Strengthened relationships with African Nova Scotian and African Canadian Communities

The Inclusion, Diversity and Community Relations (IDCR) Division of DCS continued to provide leadership and support on strategic initiatives and policy and program design. Government's Count Us In: Nova Scotia's Action Plan in Response to the International Decade for People of African Descent and the path forward outlined by the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children Restorative Inquiry remain DCS' guides to developing and implementing meaningful and culturally relevant policies and programs. Key priorities included the advancement and recruitment of staff of African

ancestry to foster leadership and growth within DCS; hosting Conversations for Change, which created a safe space for DCS staff to engage in critical conversations about diversity and inclusion.

In response to the recommendation from the Because We Matter Healing sessions and in support of the mandate to address anti-Black racism, DCS supported the development of a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) pilot program, aimed at improving representation of African Nova Scotians in the profession of social work. This initiative sponsored five African Nova Scotian staff, who completed their BSW, graduating in spring 2023. The Department of Community Services continued to support two more African Nova Scotian staff through the pilot program and another studying towards the Master of Social Work. In collaboration with Dalhousie University, Department of Health and Wellness, Department of Advanced Education, and other government and community organizations, the Africentric Bachelor of Social Work Cohort program was developed for those who are connected to one of the 52 historical African Nova Scotian communities or are New Canadians. Seventy percent of the seats are designated to African Nova Scotians. Eighty applications have been received for the Cohort program with 37 seats confirmed for fall 2023.

Policy development and evaluation processes continued to use an anti-racist lens to ensure equitable decision making. The Child and Family Wellbeing Program implemented updated racial and cultural identification information of children in care to improve data and better inform policies, programs, and services. The Department of Community Services staff continue to receive training on the importance of race-based data collection best practices.

A Director was hired to lead the new Africentric CFW unit who is developing a team of social workers of African ancestry in providing cultural advice and guidance to social workers working with children, youth, and families of African ancestry.

The Disability Support Program explored opportunities to improve culturally appropriate and relevant services and programming for African Nova Scotians with disabilities. In preparation for engagement sessions with community, a series of outreach sessions were held in fall 2022 to share information, develop partnerships with community, and to expand DSP's understanding of concerns facing African Nova Scotians when accessing government services.

The Employment Support and Income Assistance Program committed to implementing all 16 recommendations of an Africentric review of the program to address structural racism and provide more culturally responsive policies and programs. The Program also committed to annualized funding for the Youth Development Initiative for African Nova Scotian Youth, a culturally responsive program for African Nova Scotian communities, coordinated by the Association of Black Social Workers. The program supports and celebrates African Nova Scotian history, culture, and is aimed to address the unique experiences and barriers that African Nova Scotian youth face.

D. Child and Youth Commission

The Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children Restorative Inquiry and the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls both recommended that an independent Child and Youth Commission be established to promote and protect the rights, interests, and well-being of children and youth in Nova Scotia. In fall 2022, government established a Steering Committee to design the Commission, with representatives from government departments and community organizations working with children and youth. Engagements were hosted to learn from Nova Scotians how a Commission could support children and youth. Over 1,000 people participated, including children and youth, organizations that work with and advocate for children and youth, African Nova Scotian

communities, and Indigenous peoples. Feedback was summarized into a [What We Heard Report](#) and will be used by government to determine next steps.

Status of Women Office

The Status of Women Office (Status of Women) works with government and community partners to advance gender equality in Nova Scotia. The Office works with the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, which advises the Minister Responsible for the *Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act* about issues affecting the lives of Nova Scotian women and girls.

Status of Women Priority Areas in 2022-23:

A. Continue to encourage women's participation in leadership

Status of Women continued to promote the virtual Campaign School for Women, which equips participants with the knowledge and skills to run for public office, organize campaigns, and pursue non-elected political roles. Status of Women also supported the Federation des Femmes Acadiennes de la Nouvelle Ecosse in adapting the Campaign School modules and hosting a French language Campaign School, which had 16 participants in 2022-23.

Status of Women supported various other leadership initiatives, such as support for Women's Centres staff to attend a gender equality conference, various grants to the Centre for Women in Business, and Women's Centres to support women's leadership initiatives, including International Women's Day events across the province.

B. Explore initiatives to strengthen women's economic security

Status of Women supported YWCA Halifax's December 6 Fund, providing women leaving domestic violence with interest-free micro-loans to cover housing costs that might otherwise hinder their leave from violence. Thirteen women received Women Innovating in Nova Scotia (WINS) Bursaries; awarded for their studies in science, technology, and skills trades at NSCC campuses across the province.

C. Ensure women and their children are safe from gender-based violence

An additional \$2.4 million was invested into government's four-year commitment to *Standing Together to Prevent Domestic Violence*. Key activities included support for: YWCA Halifax's Safer Spaces program that provides supports, services and housing to victims of human trafficking; continuation of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre's Healthy Relationships Program to reduce gender-based violence in the community and promote healthy relationships for young people; domestic violence training for service providers, including HRM Police Victims Services and government agencies; and expanded funding for GuysWork, which supported approximately 300 boys and young men in school to have conversations about health, wellness, and identity.

As part of an interdepartmental team, Status of Women continues to identify opportunities to address issues and integrate Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls into strategic initiatives like the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence, *Standing Together*, Indigenous Justice Action Plan, and Treaty Education. Investments were made to start work on developing the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association Resilience Centre in Millbrook First Nation; the first centre of its kind in Canada, dedicated to healing and resilience for Indigenous women, girls, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, and their families through trauma-informed and culturally appropriate programming.

Status of Women continued participating in the Creating Communities of Care Through a Customary Law Approach project, focused on culturally appropriate practices and resources for urban Indigenous and African Nova Scotian women. Status of Women continued its support in 2022-23 of the Jane Paul Indigenous Women's Resource Centre. In line with the *Mi'kmaw Language Act*, which came into effect on Treaty Day, October 1, 2022, Status of Women partnered with the Mi'kmaw on a multi-year language revitalization strategy.

Financial Results

Department of Community Services Expenses Summary (\$ thousands)

<u>Programs and Services</u>	<u>2022-23 Estimate</u>	<u>2022-23 Actuals</u>	<u>2022-23 Variance</u>
Senior Management	921	1,038	117
Strategic Policy and Decision Support	8,459	8,926	467
Corporate Services Unit	3,919	3,989	70
Inclusion, Diversity and Community Relations	337	401	64
Service Delivery	100,180	102,592	2,412
Strategic Operations and Innovation	13,437	14,239	802
Disability Support Program	500,852	525,276	24,424
Child and Family Wellbeing	131,218	151,539	20,321
Employment Support and Income Assistance	444,089	437,057	(7,033)
Status of Women Office	14,240	22,434	8,194
Total - Departmental Expenses	1,217,652	1,267,491	49,839
Additional Information:			
Ordinary Revenues	0	0	0
Fees and Other Charges	11	20	9
Ordinary Recoveries	16,286	14,830	(1,456)
Total: Revenue, Fees and Recoveries	16,297	14,850	(1,447)
TCA Purchase Requirements	1,898	799	(653)
Funded Staff (# of FTEs)			
Department Funded Staff	1,610.3	1,613.0	2.7

Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation:

DCS expenses were \$49.8 million or 4.1 per cent higher than estimate primarily due to \$33.5 million for additional supports for children and adults with complex needs, \$32.8 million for healthcare retention initiatives, \$19.9 million of affordability investments to help offset rising cost of living, \$8.2 million for Hurricane Fiona related supports, \$8.0 million in NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women mainly additional support for women-serving organizations, \$19.3 million for continued investments creating capacity to support homeless population, and \$5.7 million to support food and poverty reduction programs. These increases are partially offset by \$35.0 million in Income Assistance due to slower than anticipated growth in caseloads, \$35.0 million in DSP due to reductions in the pace of new home completion due to supply chain and construction issues, and \$12.8 million lower than anticipated NS Child Benefit utilization.

Revenue, Fees and Recoveries Variance Explanation:

Recoveries are \$1.4 million or 9% lower than estimate due to lower than anticipated recoveries of Income Assistance overpayment and client income from the Government of Canada; and is partially offset by the increased recoveries of the Child Special Allowance and federally cost-shared projects.

TCA Purchase Requirements Variance Explanation:

n/a: under \$1 million

Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation:

n/a

Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

Annual Report under Section 18 of the *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act*

The *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act* was proclaimed into law on December 20, 2011.

The Act provides for government employees to be able to come forward if they reasonably believe that a wrongdoing has been committed or is about to be committed and they are acting in good faith.

The Act also protects employees who do disclose from reprisals, by enabling them to lay a complaint of reprisal with the Labour Board.

A Wrongdoing for the purposes of the Act is:

- a) a contravention of provincial or federal laws or regulations;
- b) a misuse or gross mismanagement of public funds or assets;
- c) an act or omission that creates an imminent risk of a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of persons or the environment; or
- d) directing or counselling someone to commit a wrongdoing.

The following is a summary of disclosures received by the Department of Community Services.

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2022-23
The number of disclosures received	0
The number of findings of wrongdoing	0
Details of each wrongdoing	n/a
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing	n/a

The process for disclosing wrongdoings is accessible by employees of the Department of Community Services through the Department's internal intranet site.