



Accountability Report 2020–21

Community Services



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Accountability Report 2020–2021

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Contents

- Accountability Statement..... 2
- Message from the Minister 3
- Financial Results..... 5
- Our Mandate, Programs and Agency..... 7
- Measuring Our Performance 7
 - 2020-21 Business Plan Outcomes 7
 - Strategic Priorities in 2020-21 7
 - Clients will be supported to have more control over their own lives..... 7
 - Clients will be better able to meet their basic needs..... 9
 - Clients will be safe and supported through increased prevention and early intervention 10
 - Clients will be more included in their communities..... 12
 - More clients will be attached to the labour market..... 13
 - Strengthen relationships with African Nova Scotia Communities 15
 - Programs and services will be delivered more efficiently..... 17
- Collaborations and Partnerships 18
 - Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children Restorative Inquiry 18
 - Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services and Indigenous Services Canada 18
 - Poverty Reduction in Nova Scotia 19
- Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women 19
 - Standing Together: A Provincial Action Plan to Prevent Domestic Violence..... 19
 - Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls..... 20
- Initiatives to Address COVID-19..... 21
- Appendix A: Public Interest and Wrongdoing Act..... 24

Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of the Department of Community Services for the year ended March 31, 2021, is prepared pursuant to the Finance Act and government policies and guidelines. These authorities require the reporting of outcomes against the Department of Community Services Business Plan for the fiscal year just ended. 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 2020-2021 Business Plan.

Department of Community Services

Original signed by:

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

Tracey Taweel, Deputy Minister of Community Services

Message from the Minister



Our role at the Department of Community Services is to provide supports and assistance so all Nova Scotians can live happy and fulfilling lives.

We believe that all Nova Scotians want to provide for themselves and their families, and contribute to their communities. At times, however, the challenges of doing so can be overwhelming. Sometimes these challenges are economic – a lack of access to food, shelter, and transportation. The pandemic has also created challenges for many and demonstrated that we must support our most vulnerable citizens.

Our work also includes ensuring children and youth are protected and families are supported. We know healthy and safe children and families are vital to building a stronger Nova Scotia.

At Community Services, we are moving toward a Child Welfare system that focuses more on prevention and early intervention and away from crisis. Programming in Prevention and Early Intervention supports children, families, and communities in a number of different areas. For example, Parenting Journey is a home visitation program that supports families experiencing complex social, emotional, and familial challenges.

Supporting Nova Scotians with disabilities and their families is a primary focus for Community Services. The Disability Support Program recognizes that people are best supported when they are living in a community have opportunities for personal growth.

In our province, women do not always have the same access to economic opportunity as men. We also know that gender-based violence affects many Nova Scotians, and it can happen to anyone.

Through the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, we are building an action plan. Standing Together is government's \$9 million, multi-year commitment to work with community organizations, groups, and experts to disrupt harmful cycles of domestic violence. Through this coordinated effort, we aim to support victims with an improved system of programs that help them rebuild their lives. Over 70 projects and initiatives are underway, and we will continue to invest in learning and innovation.

These are some examples of our work to support Nova Scotians to lead meaningful lives, provide for themselves and their families, and contribute to their communities. Our goal remains simple: provide more support to the Nova Scotians who need it most. I

encourage you to read further about these and other initiatives in this 2020-21 Accountability Report.

It is my pleasure to join this talented group of skilled professionals. Their dedication and commitment to the people we serve is truly inspiring.

Thank you.

Karla MacFarlane, Minister, Community Services

Financial Results

<u>Accountability Report - Financial Table and Variance Explanation</u>			
<i>Department of Community Services</i>			
For the Year Ending March 31, 2021			
Program & Service Area	2020-21	2020-21	2020-21
	Estimate	Actuals	Variance
(\$ thousands)			
Departmental Expenses:			
Senior Management	974	1,133	159
Policy and Innovation	10,947	9,575	-1,372
Corporate Services Unit	4,355	4,426	71
Service Delivery	94,358	98,284	3,926
Strategic Services	11,927	12,940	1,013
Disability Support Program	389,509	417,765	28,256
Child, Youth and Family Support Program	105,086	121,000	15,914
Employment Support and Income Assistance Program	372,228	342,030	-30,198
NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women	12,818	13,471	653
Total: Departmental Expenses	1,002,202	1,020,624	18,422
Additional Information:			
Ordinary Revenues	0	0	0
Fees and Other Charges	6	15	9
Ordinary Recoveries	15,786	20,875	5,089
Total Revenue, Fees and Recoveries	15,792	20,890	5,098
TCA Purchase Requirements	1,740	1,235	-505
Provincial Funded Staff (FTE's)	1,533.7	1,598.7	65.0

Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation:

Department of Community Services expenses were \$18.4 million or 1.8 per cent higher than estimate due to \$22.9 million in net COVID-19 related expenses, which included temporary Disability Support Program shelter arrangements, Essential Worker Benefit program funding, federal Workforce Development Agreement funding, additional Federal

Safe Restart initiatives, and capital stimulus investments for four replacement small option homes. These costs were partially offset by declining caseloads in Employment Support and Income Assistance as a result of federal COVID-19 programs and reduced utilization costs in Child, Youth and Family Services due to COVID-19 related restrictions.

Other expenses decreased by a net \$4.5 million which included reductions of \$15.6 million for implementation delays in Disability Support Program projects, \$6.4 million for the Nova Scotia Child Benefit due to timing of implementation, \$5.1 million in Pharmacare utilization, and \$1.6 million in Employment Support Services programming. These decreases were partially offset by increases of \$14.0 million for Child, Youth and Family Services emergency placement and foster care costs, \$7.0 million for Disability Support Program temporary shelter arrangements and extra staffing, and \$5.2 million in Service Delivery to address service demand.

Ordinary Recoveries Variance Explanation:

Department of Community Services recoveries were \$5.1 million or 32.2 per cent higher than estimate primarily due to \$5.7 million in additional federal funding under the Workforce Development Agreement to support recovery efforts in response to COVID-19.

TCA Purchase Requirements Variance Explanation:

The Department's TCA variance is due to a delay in completion of components of planned work for the Digital Services project. The project is expected to be completed in 2021-22.

Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation:

The Department's FTEs were higher than Estimate primarily due to increased demand for supports for children in care of the province.

Our Mandate, Programs and Agency

The overall mandate of the Department of Community Services is to provide effective supports and assistance for people in need so that they can live happy and fulfilling lives. The services provided by the Department form Nova Scotia's social safety net and play a significant role in contributing to better futures for Nova Scotians and improving the overall health and well-being of communities throughout the province.

The Department has three core business areas: Employment Support and Income Assistance, Child, Youth and Family Supports, and the Disability Support Program. The Department is also responsible for the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Detailed information regarding our core programs can be found in our 2020-21 Business Plan.

Measuring Our Performance

2020-21 Business Plan Outcomes

The following describes key outcomes against actions identified in our 2020-21 Business Plan. The outcomes are presented in the context of the overall outcomes the Department aims to achieve.

Strategic Priorities in 2020-21

Clients will be supported to have more control over their own lives

Person Directed Planning

Person Directed Planning is a pilot program that assists children or adults with disabilities who are not currently supported by service providers to access supports that enhance their engagement with their local community. Participants create their own personal plans to achieve their life goals, such as increased social inclusion, employment, volunteer activities, and learning opportunities. Key learnings from the pilot will be used to explore programming options for children and youth with disabilities.

In April 2020, a selection committee, including first voice participants, their families, and representatives from the Disability Support Program, selected three service providers to deliver Person Directed Planning across the province: Summer Street for Northern Nova Scotia, Autism Nova Scotia for the Central and Western regions, and Breton Ability Centre for the Eastern region. Services were officially launched by these service providers in August 2020, who were creative in using technology to counter the impact of COVID-19 restrictions at that time.

As of May 31, 2021, there were 115 participants involved with Person Directed Planning, ranging from teenagers to seniors, identifying issues related to housing, employment,

skills development, accessing health services, connecting with the Department of Community Services, managing finances, and attending more social events. All service providers have reported positive experiences in connecting participants to community resources.

Independent community living pilot program model

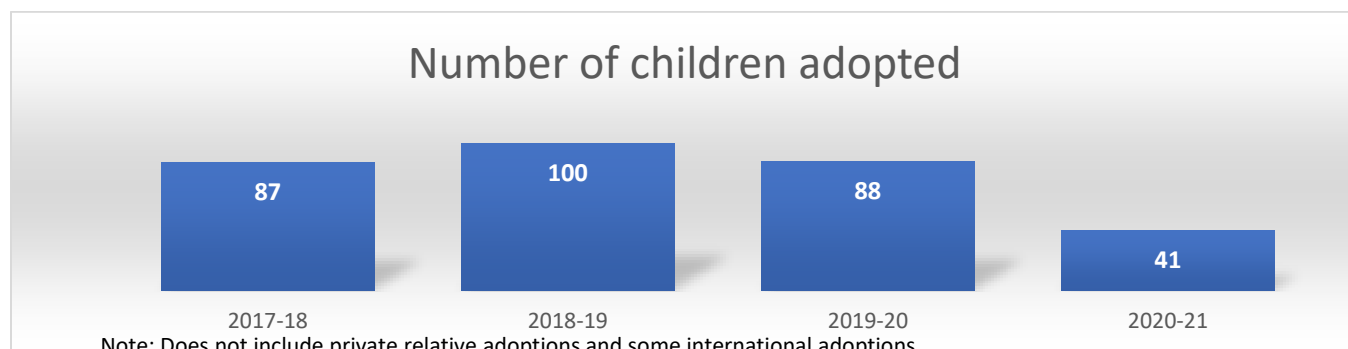
The Departments of Community Services and Health and Wellness worked with Independent Living Nova Scotia to develop eligibility criteria for a pilot program model to enable young adults with physical disabilities and nursing support needs to live independently in the community. Support services within the community will include the provision of nursing supports, services from a care coordinator from each Department, and the daily supports offered by the on-site staff of the service provider, Independent Living Nova Scotia. Assessments will be conducted to identify four individuals who will participate in the pilot in 2021-22.

Modernization of Open Adoption Records Legislation

Building on the public consultation on open adoption records that took place in 2019-20, DCS partnered with the Association of Black Social Workers to conduct a targeted engagement with African Nova Scotians. The feedback from these two consultations, along with input from Mi'kmaw leaders, formed the basis of the new legislation introduced in March 2021 – *An Act to Open Adoption Records in Nova Scotia*. The new legislation received Royal Assent on April 19, 2021.

The premise of the new legislation is that once an adopted child reaches the age of majority, both the adopted person and birth parents should have access to information in the adoption file if they want it, unless there is a disclosure veto on file limiting the disclosure of identifying information. The Department continues to design a new disclosure program that will include new supports and services, increased resources, and a new online application system that will be fully operational in spring 2022.

On average, the Department has overseen the adoption of approximately 80 children per year since 2017-18. This does not include private relative adoptions and some international adoptions.

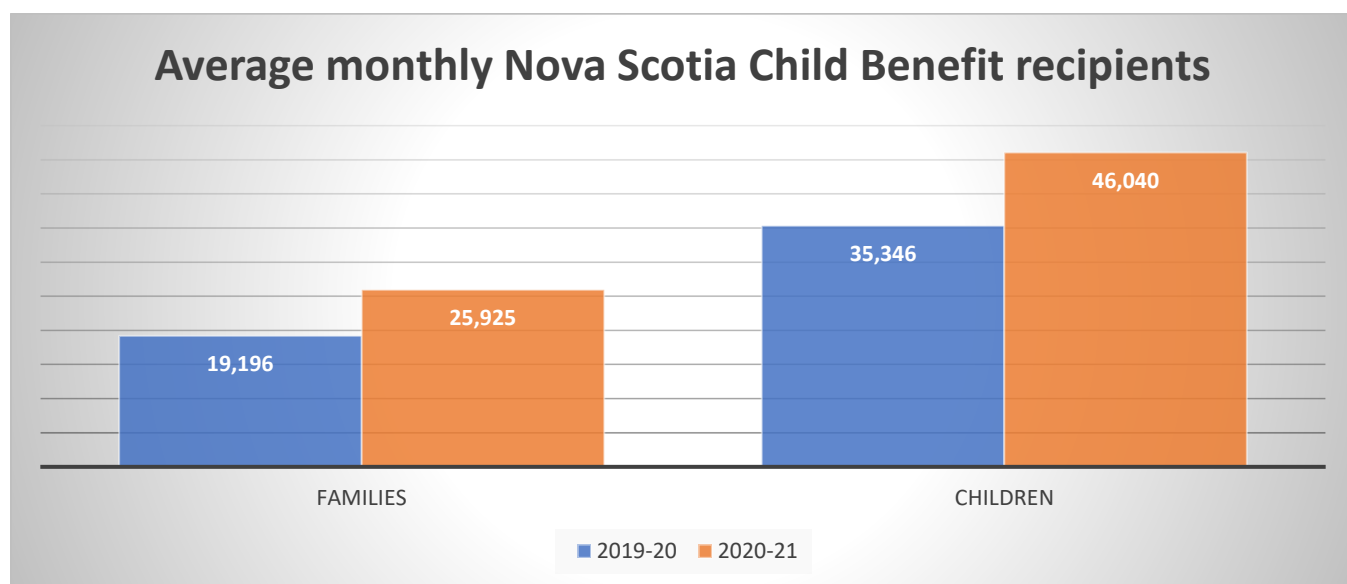


Clients will be better able to meet their basic needs

Nova Scotia Child Benefit

DCS invested an additional \$18 million annually into the Nova Scotia Child Benefit. The benefit is a tax-free monthly payment intended to help families offset the cost of raising children under the age of 18. This new investment provides more money to families who were already eligible for the Nova Scotia Child Benefit and expands the benefit for new families. In 2019-20, an average of 19,196 families (35,346 children) received the benefit every month. As a result of the additional investment in 2020-21, current available data shows that between July 2020 to February 2021, an average of 25,925 families (46,040 children) across the province were receiving the benefit each month. This was an increase of 6,500 families (10,500 children) over the previous year.

Child poverty remains a great concern for Nova Scotian families, poverty advocates, service providers, and the Department. This investment complimented federal government benefits and are part of the Department's efforts to improve supports to lower-income families with children.



Low-Income Pharmacare for Children Program

Families who are eligible for the Nova Scotia Child Benefit are also eligible to access supports for their children from the Low-Income Pharmacare for Children Program. This program provides prescription drug coverage for children under the age of 18 living in low-income families and who do not already have coverage from other programs. Families pay a \$5 co-pay fee per prescription. As a result of new families/children accessing the Nova Scotia Child Benefit in 2020-21, approximately 10,500 new children were also eligible for the Low-Income Pharmacare for Children Program.

Clients will be safe and supported through increased prevention and early intervention

Preventive, family-based programming for at-risk children and families

The Department recognizes that the success of Nova Scotia's child welfare system is dependent on the ability to shift from a crisis-driven system to one that concentrates on family-centered prevention and early intervention. In 2020-21 the following outcomes were achieved:

- *Parenting Journey Program*, a home visitation program to support the health, wellbeing, and safety of children, youth, and families, was updated and now includes the integration of clinical consultation supports for staff working with families who have complex needs. The program was also expanded, with a new location added in Hants County, and increased capacity created in four programs in Halifax and Cumberland to alleviate waitlist pressures and serve more families in these regions.
- *Families Plus Program*, an intensive family preservation program for families involved in child protection whose children are at risk of coming into care, was expanded to serve more families. To increase cultural responsiveness, one of the two expanded programs was dedicated to serving families who identify as African Nova Scotian and is staffed by Social Workers who identify as African Nova Scotian.
- *Youth Outreach Program*, which supports youth experiencing risk factors, was enhanced via an updated program model and expanded to three new sites in the Halifax Regional Municipality, which focus primarily on serving African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw youth. In addition, an existing program increased its capacity in the Windsor-Kentville area to better support the emerging needs of African Nova Scotian youth in that region.
- A new *Community Family Peer Support Network* framework and program model were developed to increase community engagement and capacity to respond to the needs of children, youth, and families who are dealing with complex issues. Community organizations in Sydney Mines and Preston Township – a primarily African Nova Scotian community – engaged grassroots members of their respective communities to develop local plans for support networks.
- The *Strengthening Fathers* framework and program model were developed to support fathers who have used or who are at risk of using violence in their relationships. This initiative also began to increase the capacity of existing service providers committed to implement the *Strengthening Fathers Program* and offer a broader continuum of programs and services to fathers.
- The Department also continued to support and fund various anti-human trafficking programs:
 - An additional \$300,000 was provided to YWCA Halifax to further expand their provincial program, the *Nova Scotia Transition and Advocacy for Youth*

- (NSTAY). NSTAY provides wrap-around support for youth ages 13-24 who are being, or at risk of being, sexually exploited/trafficked.
- \$75,000 was provided to YWCA Halifax to support their *Trafficking and Exploitation Support System* (TESS). TESS is an inter-agency provincial partnership of over 140 community leaders and professionals working with children and youth engaged in the sex trade across Nova Scotia. The primary purpose of TESS is to mobilize communities for action against the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and youth. TESS also provides free training on CSEC to service providers across Nova Scotia.
 - \$100,000 was provided to the Association of Black Social Workers to support training, awareness and community mobilization on the issue of human trafficking, with a specific focus on the impacts on African Nova Scotian and Black communities.

The enhancement and expansion of prevention and early intervention supports is a multi-year initiative intended to make changes to the child welfare system to reduce the need for child protection and children in care services over time. Prevention and early intervention initiatives focus on strengthening programming to serve children, youth, and families who are at increased risk of child protection involvement. This work is intended to decrease the negative social and economic impacts that more costly and intrusive interventions can cause.



Expansion and diversification of placement options for children and youth in care

The Department is expanding and diversifying its placement options to help ensure children can be placed according to their needs. In 2019, the Department began exploring opportunities for individualized living arrangements for children and youth in care with complex needs. These living arrangements are intended to be tailored to meet the needs of each specific child, with programming, services, and supports that fulfill their individual care plans. Since February 2020, the Department has been at full capacity to provide individualized living arrangements, with 6 children/youth involved.

In 2020-21, the Department also completed an evaluation of the *Alternative Family Care* program. This program aims to prevent the need for children to come into care by providing financial assistance to extended family members and other caregivers to look after children who are not in the Minister’s care, but whose parents are unable or unwilling to care for them. The program is designed to help reduce the stress on a parent

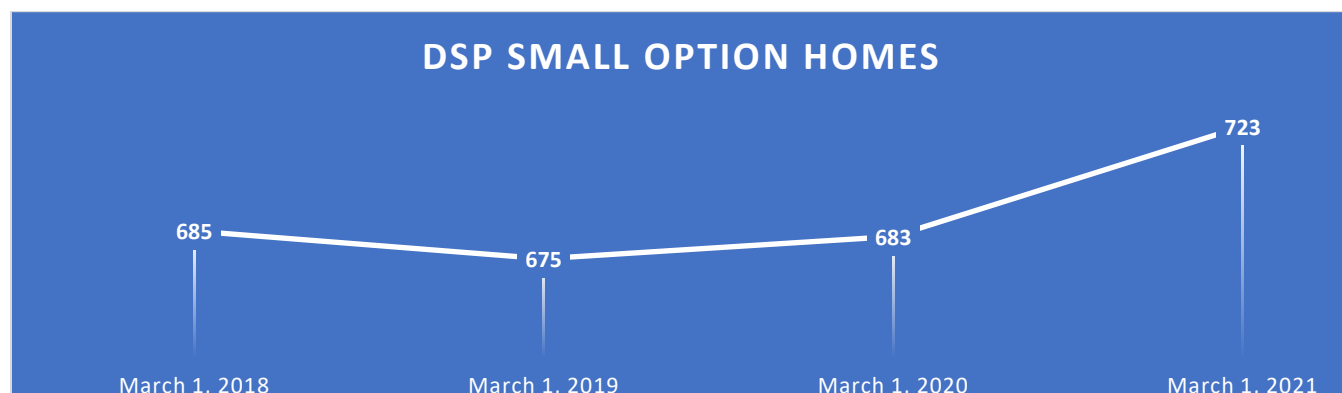
or guardian knowing their child is being supported in a familiar place and home, which allows them to focus on getting help and remedying the problems that necessitate their child to leave their care. The results from the evaluation are currently being reviewed and analyzed.

The *Alternative Family Care* program was implemented in 2019-20, with 760 children participating in the program that year, cared for by 506 active caregivers (averaged 1.6 children per caregiver). In 2020-21, 843 children participated in the program, cared for by 316 caregivers (187 of which carried over from the previous year). The program has yielded positive results for children/youth by providing less intrusive supports than would otherwise have been provided.

Clients will be more included in their communities

Expansion of community-based programs and supports for persons with disabilities

Further work on creating Small Option Homes across the province continued in 2020-21. Each home is fully accessible and meets the current and future needs of residents. Six of eight homes were opened in 2021. Participation in Small Option homes has increased over the last few years, with 723 people participating as of March 2021. This is up from 683 participants in March 2020.



In 2020-2021, 47 new program participants were accepted into the Independent Living Support program and 2 new participants were accepted into the Flex Independent program. Participants are supported to live independently, using individualized funding for the supports of their choosing in the home of their choice. Participation in both programs has increased steadily since 2018. As of March 31, 2021, a total of 369 people were participating in the Independent Living Support program and 34 were participating in the Flex Independent program.

In 2020-21, the Youth Day Program pilots received additional funding, which enabled service providers to deliver a mixture of skills development, recreational, and leisure activities to youth ages 16 to 24. These services supported participants in achieving their

personal goals, including attachment to the labour market and feeling included in their local community. All Youth Day Programs were required to follow Public Health approved COVID-19 re-opening plans.

Recognizing the significant need for more homes in the community in the years to come, and as the focus shifts to community-based supports and services, the Disability Support Program has developed specific design requirements for new homes to best support residents. These requirements were developed based on feedback from current residents and staff of community-based homes. The design requirements not only meet federal building code standards, but they are also reflective of the unique needs of persons with disabilities who are supported in residential programs. The design requirements were incorporated into a recent Request for Proposals for Modular (or prefabricated) homes, which will enable the Disability Support Program to quickly and cost effectively build new homes that meet the needs of program participants.

Continue to phase out large residential facilities

In 2020-21, the Department began planning its approach to phasing out large residential facilities for persons with disabilities. On average, over the last four years there have been 357 individuals residing in Adult Residential Centres and 164 residing in Regional Rehabilitation Centres.

In October 2020, DCS announced the planned closure of Harbourside Lodge Adult Residential Centre in Yarmouth. The Disability Support Program is working with Harbourside staff, residents, and their families to identify appropriate community-based homes for residents.

Throughout 2020-21, new community placements were established. Individuals transitioning from larger facilities to the community will have the opportunity to choose the community-based service providers from whom they wish to access supports from.

To support the reduction of the reliance on larger residential facilities, DCS is adjusting the eligibility criteria for these programs to keep new admission numbers low throughout the multi-year phasing out of the facilities.

[More clients will be attached to the labour market](#)

Expansion and evaluation of education and employment support services for at-risk youth

The Department continues to explore the improvement and expansion of preventive, post-secondary, and labour market attachment supports to youth at risk to disrupt the cycle of inter-generational poverty. Since expanding preventative services for youth, there has been a consistent decline in new income assistance intakes for youth ages 18-24. During the early phase of COVID-19, the Department continued to work collaboratively

with service providers to support a shift to virtual delivery of education and employment services, or to position activities to resume as quickly as possible once entering the recovery phase. Initiatives like Career Rising, Inspiring Success, and the Youth Development Initiative continued to provide services to youth with an increased emphasis on mental health related supports. The Department is also providing an Africentric lens to services and programs for vulnerable youth.

- In 2020-21, the EDGE pilot program was expanded to support an additional 200 young people across the province. EDGE is now available to financially vulnerable youth, youth transitioning out of care, and income assistance clients aged 18 to 26. The program supports youth to achieve financial independence by providing wrap-around supports with individualized mentorship and mental health support, followed by a supported placement with an employer in their community. Participants develop the skills, confidence, and connections needed to find and maintain full-time work. EDGE participation is helping youth to exit income assistance to financial independence in half the time required by youth not engaged in EDGE.

The expansion of EDGE includes the integration of an Africentric lens to the programming and was made possible due to four new service providers partnering with the Department to deliver the program in Bridgewater, New Glasgow, Sydney, and the north end of Halifax. The program now operates in six locations across the province, including Halifax and Kentville.

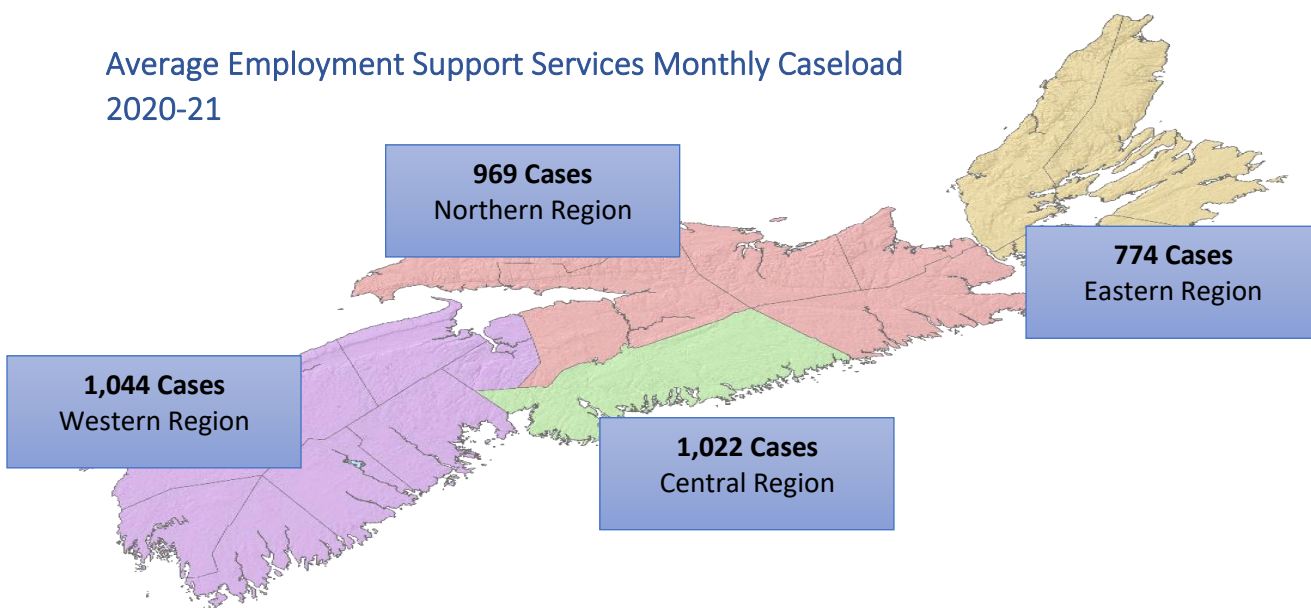
- The Department introduced the Digital Skills to SucSEED pilot – a one-year pilot initiative delivered by the Society for Enterprise and Development (SEED). This pilot is providing employment-focused support to 100 youth living in child and youth caring facilities (formerly residential placements) or foster care to support their successful transition from care to independence, either through labour market attachment or post-secondary education. Participants meet virtually and supports are provided to address the unique barriers facing youth in care. A subsidized work term follows the virtual programming.

Expansion and implementation of new, tailored employment support services to better meet the changing needs of adult income assistance recipients

The Department continued to work collaboratively with service providers and employers to support clients in accessing services and employment opportunities during COVID-19 and throughout the pandemic's recovery phases. Income assistance clients were not required to participate with employment support services during the early phase of the pandemic; however, a shift to digital service delivery helped keep clients safe, supported, and able to complete some activities with reduced impact, or to resume them quickly once the province entered recovery phase.

The Educate to Work program continues to help income assistance clients achieve meaningful, long-term employment by connecting participants to post-secondary

education of two years or less (Nova Scotia Community College or a Private Career College). Supports include 100% coverage of tuition, books, mandatory fees, and supplies, as well as costs related to transportation, childcare, and tutoring. In 2020-21, the program served 228 participants across the province. During the early phase of the pandemic, students were supported with an Internet Bursary and access to Nova Scotia Community College's expanded loan library for equipment to ensure their continued success when courses shifted to online delivery.



Strengthen relationships with African Nova Scotia Communities

Initiatives to address systemic racism and discrimination including culturally appropriate youth outreach and community programs focused on sexual violence prevention

Culturally appropriate programs that focus on sexual violence prevention are important. In 2020-2021, support and funding was provided to:

- *Sexual Violence Prevention Youth Outreach Programs*, which support youth at risk of sexual violence. Two of these programs are focused on serving marginalized communities, specifically African Nova Scotia and Indigenous youth.
- *Sexual Violence Prevention and Supports Community Mobilization Programs*, which engage community at the grassroots level to raise awareness about sexual violence and develop local community action to help prevent sexual violence. One of these provincial programs is led by and for the African Nova Scotia community.

DCS has worked closely with cultural representatives to gather first voice perspectives on how programs can be designed to be culturally relevant and culturally safe in meeting the

needs of African Nova Scotian and Indigenous children, youth, and families. This has included elements such as:

- Defining program principles that reflect Africentric and/or Indigenous practices, theories, and approaches.
- Increasing the capacity of the *Youth Outreach Program* to engage African Nova Scotian youth in the Windsor-Kentville area by funding an African Nova Scotian Youth Outreach Worker.
- Defining program requirements that encourage and nurture exploration of culture, history, and identity, and that recognize the impact of racism and intergenerational trauma experiences for African Nova Scotia children, youth and families.
- Community connections are a crucial protective layer to keep children, youth, and families safe, healthy, connected, and well-supported to reach their full potential. The *Community Family Peer Support Initiative* was launched in the Preston Township to enable community members to develop local models of peer and community support for children, youth and families. This work honours and recognizes that grassroots community members are best positioned to engage children, youth, families, and the community through low-barrier engagement activities such as social events and gatherings.
- Developing an intensive family preservation program, *Families Plus*, specifically for African Nova Scotian families in HRM and staffed by African Nova Scotian Social Workers.
- Delivering the *Nurturing Strong African Nova Scotian Families* parenting program through ongoing community partnership. The program was delivered during the height of COVID-19 using an online platform.
- The Department also launched its own anti-Black racism policy, which supports a zero-tolerance approach to racist behaviours of all forms. The policy reinforces the Department's efforts to working toward ending the personal and systemic racism experienced by DCS staff and clients of African descent. It operates within the framework of our government's *Respectful Workplace Policy* and code of conduct, "*Values, Ethics and Conduct*". The policy is accompanied by a training plan for staff to support its integration into everyday work.

Morning Cafés to engage the African Nova Scotian community

This innovative forum for community engagement provided an opportunity for departmental staff to begin strengthening relationships with African Nova Scotian communities. DCS is exploring opportunities to expand the Morning Café community engagement, virtually, across the province within African Nova Scotian communities.

Additionally, the Department's Inclusion, Diversity and Community Relations Division collaborated with Public Health, the Health Association of African Canadians, and the Association of Black Social Workers to provide information about DCS to African Nova Scotian community members during the second dose vaccine clinics held in several African Nova Scotian communities. Over one thousand African Nova Scotian community

members were provided with resources while they remained in the recovery area after their vaccine, which included a light snack, information about the Department's programs, and a message from our Deputy Minister that included an update on the Department's anti-Black racism action plan. This initiative was well received by community members.

Delivering initiatives identified within government's Count Us In: Nova Scotia's Action Plan in Response to the International Decade for People of African Descent.

The Department has explored opportunities to respond to the Count Us In Action Plan. DCS strives to enhance its understanding of African Nova Scotian history, and to engage with African Nova Scotian communities across the province to explore improvements to policies, programs, and to ensure the delivery of culturally relevant services. Some initiatives that have been underway include:

- Determining the demographic data needs of government, including the appropriate collection and interpretation of data, to enhance our understanding of the needs of the African Nova Scotians and to ensure relevant service delivery.
- Exploring improvements to current programs and services to establish culturally inclusive, relevant, and responsive practices
- Seeking opportunities to implement the *Because We Matter* recommendations, through formalizing DCS' relationship with the Association of Black Social Workers.
- Providing anti-Black racism education to all levels of Management to support the creation of a safe and supportive work environment for African Nova Scotian DCS staff.

Programs and services will be delivered more efficiently

Evidence-based assessment methodology for Disability Support Program participants

In 2020-2021, the Disability Support Program undertook a trial of a new assessment tool called InterRAI. InterRAI is an international, research-based organization that develops assessment tools for a wide variety of populations. The Disability Support Program is currently trialing two assessment tools to determine how they might serve program participants. Having a new assessment tool would enable the Disability Support Program to improve consistency and accuracy in assigning supports and budgets to program participants that meet their needs. This work supports the Department's exploration of individualized funding for all program participants, which would enable participants more choice and control over the supports and services they access.

Launch of a new, accessible, and client-focused online service delivery channel

In February 2021, the Centralized Client Service Unit was established – a new, provincial team with the mandate to serve Employment Support and Income Assistance clients and Disability Support Program participants at the intake phase through a telephone channel. Providing intake services by telephone ensures consistency and anonymity in service delivery, and an overall enhanced experience for clients.

Implementation of the Consolidated Allegations Investigation Team

DCS created a Consolidated Allegations Investigations Team to investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect in foster homes. This team is providing fair and objective assessments of allegations made against foster parents, while serving the best interest of children and attempting to preserve the integrity of foster parents. This process addresses one of the single most challenging experiences raised by foster families.

Further Supports for Foster Families

The Department invested \$5 million in foster parents through the *Because You Care Initiative* to recognize that they incur day to day expenses while caring for children that are not reimbursed by the Department. Full-time foster parents of 12 months or more received a one-time \$5,000 payment. The balance of the \$5 million is being held by the Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia to manage and issue to foster families going forward.

[Collaborations and Partnerships](#)

Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children Restorative Inquiry

The Department is working restoratively with community partners to understand, heal, and build stronger, deeper, more appreciative, and respectful relationships with our African/Black colleagues, clients, and families. This work involves addressing actions and recommendations published in the final report released by the Restorative Inquiry Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children, with a focus on acting on systemic racism within existing systems and structures to better support African Nova Scotians across the province. In 2020-21, the Department worked to build and strengthen its relationship with the African Nova Scotian Community, re-orient systems of care to empower African Nova Scotians seeking support from our programs, and support restorative responses to future issues of institutional failures of care for African Nova Scotian children, youth, and families.

Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services and Indigenous Services Canada

On February 28, 2019, the Government of Canada introduced Bill C-92, *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*. This legislation was co-developed with Indigenous, provincial, and territorial partners with the goal of keeping Indigenous children and youth connected to their families, communities, and culture. National principles such as the best interests of the child, cultural continuity, and substantive equality have been established to help guide the provision of Indigenous child and family services. This *Act* also enables Indigenous groups and communities to transition toward exercising partial or full jurisdiction over child and family services at a pace that they choose.

In response to this legislation, DCS been engaged in initiatives in 2020-21 to ensure an appropriate response to the needs of Indigenous children, youth, and families involved with Child Welfare:

- DCS worked with Mi'kmaw Family and Children Services to complete a review of all Child Welfare policies, ensuring they reflect and align with the principles and expectations of *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*.
- Kwilmuk Maw-klusuaqn (KMK) is working toward self-governance of child and family services for Indigenous children, youth, and families. They have requested and been provided with all DCS Child Welfare policies, forms, and protocols to help inform their subcommittee work.
- DCS continues to work through the Ministers responsible for Social Services across Canada to share information and work to collectively address key questions and implementation challenges related to the new legislation.
- Collaboration continues with First Nations partners and the federal government to ensure our Child Welfare legislation, regulations, and policies are culturally informed, accountable, and aligned with work happening in Nova Scotia.
- Discussions continue with partners on the interpretation and application of Jordan's Principle for Indigenous children involved with Child Welfare. Jordan's Principle is a child-first principle that requires public supports and services be delivered by government to Indigenous children with status, by whichever government they contact first.

Poverty Reduction in Nova Scotia

Grants were provided to a wide range of organizations and communities to test innovative poverty reduction projects and develop capacity in communities across the province. While there were delays in the implementation of some projects due to the challenges of COVID-19, recipients worked diligently to get their projects up and running. Grants covered many poverty reduction themes such as food security, transportation, children, youth transitioning to adulthood, mental health, economic inclusion, workforce attachment, and housing, with an additional focus on helping communities with low-income survive the challenges that COVID-19 presented, including supporting Feed Nova Scotia in addressing the significant food security issues that arose. Funding also supported larger initiatives such as a Rural Transportation Subsidy Program, Mobile Food Market, Leave Out Violence's outreach to indigenous communities and online tutoring for students.

[Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women](#)

Standing Together: A Provincial Action Plan to Prevent Domestic Violence

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women continued its work with partners across government and community to build relationships, knowledge, and understanding to develop Standing Together, the province's coordinated action plan to prevent domestic violence.

Fiscal year 2020-21 saw the conclusion of the third year of the Action Plan. To date, the Action Plan has involved projects and initiatives to identify innovative approaches and opportunities to work in more integrated ways to disrupt cycles of violence and address this complex issue.

In 2020-21 some examples of collaborative initiatives included:

- The establishment of a Men's Helpline in collaboration with 211 Nova Scotia and Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia. A Department-led evaluation found that between September 2020 and March 2021, the Helpline serviced 794 phone calls from 278 unique callers seeking one-time counselling sessions from a trained counsellor on staff. Callers could access these one-time counselling sessions as frequently as they needed. Longer-term counselling services were opened for 94 callers requiring more intensive supports from an assigned therapist. Up to 6 sessions were available to each of these callers. Expanded services will be launched in 2021-22 including a Women's Helpline and an All-Genders Helpline.
- Ongoing collaboration with the Department of Justice on transformative system responses, including the establishment of a prototype for a case review process for the highest risk domestic violence cases.
- Two Transition House organizations have been undertaking significant capital projects that will result in two new state of the art Transition House domestic violence shelters in Halifax and Kentville. The new shelters are scheduled to open in 2021-22. Status of Women has provided continued supports to help guide both organizations through this change, including preparations to move to the new shelters and strengthening operations and service delivery.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

In 2020-21, Status of Women worked with Mi'kmaw partners to address immediate priorities and develop a path forward to respond to the Calls for Justice in Nova Scotia. The principles that guided our approach during the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry - honouring relationships, keeping families at the centre, and collaboration - have informed our work and actions taken to date. In 2020-21, we continued to work with Mi'kmaw, Federal, Provincial, and Territorial colleagues to explore how we can address root causes and move forward together.

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women's collective work recognizes the interconnected and intergenerational impacts of systemic discrimination, racism, and sexism, with a focus on healing, wellness, safety, and resilience. Key work in 2020-21 included:

- The re-opening of the Jane Paul Indigenous Women's Centre in Sydney, through a five-year commitment of \$150,000 per year to March 31, 2025. This investment has enabled the Centre to expand its footprint and bring on additional programming and wrap-around supports for clients.

- Collaboration with urban Indigenous and African Nova Scotian partners, through the Creating Communities of Care Project, to develop and provide culturally appropriate supports for women and their families experiencing gender-based violence. Throughout the pandemic, supports have continued and evolved, meeting clients where they are at, and uncovering further protective factors and systemic barriers to address. This project continues to June 30, 2023.
- Supporting the planning and development of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association's Resilience Centre, which has been identified by the Mi'kmaw community as a priority for moving forward with Indigenous women-led healing, wellness, culture, economic security, and resilience programming.
- Supplemented funding from the Atlantic Canada Opportunity Agency (ACOA) to support the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association in the development and launch of the *Sisterness Trading Post*, an e-commerce site for Mi'kmaw women and gender diverse artists/crafters to connect with online markets and expand their sales. This work builds on a previous project funded through the Poverty Reduction Blueprint titled *Sisterness and Work*, which explored ways to enhance economic opportunities for primarily rural Indigenous women and families.

[Initiatives to Address COVID-19](#)

Investments to support Feed Nova Scotia and community food banks across Nova Scotia

The Department provided \$1.6 million to Feed Nova Scotia in 2020-21 to help Feed Nova Scotia launch a Home Delivery Food Box Program in May 2020 to meet the urgent and emergency needs of vulnerable Nova Scotians impacted by COVID-19. The program delivers two-weeks' worth of non-perishable food to all areas of the province through predominantly volunteer services. The program was designed to be non-stigmatizing and Nova Scotians can access it by calling 211. The program eligibility is intended to serve those most in need that cannot access local resources, and/or do not have friends and family support. The program was expanded during the second and third waves to provide support to families impacted by school closures.

Family Resource Centres funded by DCS stepped into a leadership role to support Public Health-identified families at risk of not being able to self-isolate because of poverty-related barriers like food security. The Family Resource Centres purchased and delivered groceries, cleaning supplies, and personal hygiene items to identified families to ensure they could successfully self-isolate.

Temporary waiver of co-pay for recipients of income assistance and the Low-Income Pharmacare for Children program

During the earlier phase of COVID-19, pharmacies began dispensing prescriptions for only 30 days at a time. This resulted in a financial hardship for income assistance recipients and beneficiaries of the Low-Income Pharmacare for Children program

requiring longer-term prescriptions who consequently needed to pay their co-pay amount every 30 days. DCS waived the co-pay requirement for 3 months to lessen this financial burden for lower-income Nova Scotians.

Interim policies to support income assistance clients during COVID-19

The Department implemented several interim policy changes during the earlier phase of COVID-19 to keep income assistance clients safe and supported. These included:

- Several policy requirements for income assistance eligibility were delayed or waived until August 2020 to help clients remain focused on their immediate needs resulting from the impacts of the pandemic. These included:
 - paused recovery of income assistance overpayments;
 - delayed requirements to provide medical documentation;
 - paused requirements to participate in employment support services;
 - increased options to provide monthly and periodic information to caseworkers regarding income and other circumstances; and
 - delayed annual reviews with caseworkers.
- Transitional pharmacare supports were extended to income assistance recipients who became eligible for CERB and who were no longer eligible for medical coverage through their employment.
- Technical equipment and internet access was provided to DCS sponsored students to enable them to continue their post-secondary studies virtually without interruption.
- Costs related to hotel stays were covered for immunocompromised individuals residing at shelters in central Nova Scotia to ensure their continued safety during the first waves of COVID-19.

Isolation Support Program

The Department implemented the Isolation Support Program to provide an emergency response to support employed/self-employed Nova Scotians experiencing employment-related impacts due to COVID-19. The program is currently operating based on need. It provides a one-time lump sum payment of \$1,000 to workers who were required to leave their employment to self-isolate either because of COVID-19, or as part of a recommended Public Health measure. Eligible participants are identified by Public Health as being at-risk of being unable to successfully self-isolate because of lost income, and recipients cannot be in receipt of any other COVID-19 federal supports.

Investments to support Transition Houses and other organizations that serve vulnerable women and their children

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women addressed the impacts of COVID-19 experienced by women. Emergency funding and follow-up support funds were rolled out under the Federal Government's Safe Restart initiative for women-serving organizations, totalling \$600 thousand in direct supports. As well, a multi-departmental COVID-19 domestic violence working group was established to address several key challenges during the first wave of the pandemic, including ensuring the provision of

personal protective equipment to women-serving organizations and emergency transportation systems for women and children to travel between shelters and public health guided isolation locations.

Additional payment to support foster families

Each foster family in Nova Scotia was provided a total of \$350 in 2020-21 to help cover the additional cost of required cleaning and sanitizing supplies because of COVID-19. Approximately 550 foster families received this payment.

Development of new, short-term emergency placements for Disability Support Program participants

In response to COVID-19 pressures, new short-term emergency placements were established for participants of the Disability Support Program and those on the waitlist for services. This initiative helped to free up acute care beds in hospitals to increase capacity for hospital responses to COVID-19 patients. It also ensured individuals leaving correctional facilities and shelters due to physical distancing requirements had an appropriate and safe placement in their community.

Interim respite funding to support families of Disability Support Program participants

Interim respite funding was provided to 387 participants of the Flex, Alternative Family Support, and Direct Family Support for Children programs who were unable to attend school or day programs due to closures throughout COVID-19. This respite recognized the need for support by families who were working from home during COVID-19 and providing daytime support to loved ones.

Supports to Nova Scotians living in the Preston Townships

DCS implemented several initiatives to respond to the unique challenges created by COVID-19 for Nova Scotians living in the HRM communities of the Preston Township:

- DCS partnered with the Association of Black Social Workers to provide food to individuals who were required to self-isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19.
- DCS covered the cost of hotel stays for self-isolating individuals or those with required to leave their home due to someone in the home testing positive or waiting for test results. Meals and personal protective equipment were also provided.
- Food and accommodations were provided to the non-profit volunteer organization 902ManUp to support clients who had to isolate outside of their home. 902ManUp is dedicated to empowering young males at risk of marginalization and social and academic exclusion.

Appendix A: Public Interest and Wrongdoing Act

Annual Report under Section 18 of the *Public 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 2020-2021
The number of disclosures received	0
The number of findings of wrongdoing	0
Details of each wrongdoing (insert separate row for each wrongdoing)	
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing (insert separate row for each wrongdoing)	

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