



# Accountability Report 2021–22

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Community Services



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Accountability Report 2021–2022

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## Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of the Department of Community Services for the year ended March 31, 2022, 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 2021-22 Business Plan.

Original signed by:

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

Original signed by:

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Tracey Taweel  
Deputy Minister of Community Services

## Message from the Minister



It is our overall goal at the Department of Community Services to build a province where everyone has equal opportunity to fully participate in society and to succeed. The department is dedicated to supporting children, those living with disabilities, those living on low incomes, those experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable Nova Scotians.

We believe that our province will be stronger in every way as we embrace diversity to its fullest. This means ensuring everyone has equal opportunity to fully participate and find success. Traditionally, our department has engaged with individuals and families at a point of crisis. We are working to change that and to target more of our efforts, programs and resources to intervene earlier and provide preventative supports at the local level, as soon as need arises or is identified.

This is a significant change but one that is critical to improving the lives of Nova Scotians. And we know, in the area of child welfare, for example, focussing on prevention and early intervention will move us away from a crisis driven system that requires costlier and often less effective interventions.

To advance in our prevention and early intervention work, we will also continue to develop new programming for children, youth and families while expanding and enhancing existing supports across Nova Scotia. To strengthen support for foster families and the children in their care, the Province will invest in a redesign of Nova Scotia's foster care system, creating a modern and sustainable system that provides families and children the supports they need to flourish.

Another key area of our work is focused on ensuring that Nova Scotians living with disabilities are better supported, have more opportunity to live in their communities and participate in employment and volunteer work. Our commitment to persons with disabilities is unwavering. Through the development of new programs, supporting more participants to live independently and the creation and implementation of new children's programming, we will ensure persons with diverse abilities have the support they need to live full lives.

Women make up 51 per cent of our province; however, the reality is that women don't always have the same access to economic opportunity and personal safety as men. This needs to change.

The Status of Women office continues to work with community partners to provide supports for women and ensure the needs of vulnerable Nova Scotians are met, while helping them pursue economic security in their lives.

Our government is committed to eliminating violence against Indigenous women and girls. We know we can't do this work on our own, and there is still a lot of work to do.

We are working with care to ensure that our actions and responses are thoughtful and inclusive of Nova Scotia's diversity and are aligned with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice.

Through collaboration with other government departments and stakeholders, we will continue to strengthen our communities and build a stronger province that is more inclusive and equitable.

I encourage you to read this 2021-22 Accountability Report and learn further about this work and other initiatives.

It is an honour to be part of such a talented group of professionals and I am inspired by their tireless dedication to support the people we serve.

Thank you.

Karla MacFarlane

Minister, Community Services; Minister, L'nu Affairs; Minister Responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women

## Financial Results

<b>Accountability Report - Financial Table and Variance Explanation</b>			
<b>Department of Community Services</b>			
<b>For the Year Ending March 31, 2022</b>			
<b>Program &amp; Service Area</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2021-22</b>
	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Actuals</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>(\$ thousands)</b>			
<b>Departmental Expenses:</b>			
Senior Management	911	1,027	116
Policy and Innovation	8,398	9,115	717
Corporate Services Unit	3,829	3,955	126
Inclusion, Diversity and Community Relations	297	313	16
Service Delivery	99,097	100,314	1,217
Strategic Services	11,832	13,009	1,177
Disability Support Program	449,592	443,813	-5,779
Child, Youth and Family Support Program	123,054	129,840	6,786
Employment Support and Income Assistance Program	416,110	376,890	-39,220
NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women	11,194	11,409	215
<b>Total: Departmental Expenses</b>	<b>1,124,314</b>	<b>1,089,685</b>	<b>-34,629</b>
<b>Additional Information:</b>			
Ordinary Revenues	0	0	0
Fees and Other Charges	6	5	-1
Ordinary Recoveries	18,721	17,948	-773
<b>Total Revenue, Fees and Recoveries</b>	<b>18,727</b>	<b>17,953</b>	<b>-774</b>
<b>TCA Purchase Requirements</b>	<b>1,879</b>	<b>920</b>	<b>-959</b>
<b>Provincial Funded Staff (FTE's)</b>	<b>1,585.5</b>	<b>1,615.5</b>	<b>30.0</b>

### Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation:

Department of Community Services expenses were \$34.6 million or 3.1 per cent lower than estimate primarily due to net COVID-19 related costs of \$43.6 million lower than budget, mainly lower income assistance costs from the continued decline in Employment Support and Income Assistance caseloads resulting from Federal COVID-19 programs. Other non COVID-19 cost pressures include \$9.5 million for Child, Youth and Family Supports for children with complex needs, increased support costs of Child Caring Programs and the foster care redesign program, \$9.2 million for homelessness



initiatives and \$6.1 million in one-time financial support for vulnerable Nova Scotians. These pressures were partially offset by \$9.9 million in net reductions in the Disability Support Program resulting from higher than expected temporary shelter arrangements and extra staffing less one-time savings in the pace of new home completion due to supply chain and construction issues, \$5.7 million in Nova Scotia Child Benefit uptake less than anticipated and \$5.5 million in Pharmacare utilization.

#### 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 2022-23.

#### Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation:

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

### About our Mandate, Programs and Agencies

The overall 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 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 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 2021-22 Business Plan.

### Measuring Our Performance

#### 2021-22 Business Plan Outcomes

The following describes key outcomes against actions identified in our 2021-22 Business Plan. The accomplishments are presented in the context of the overall outcomes the department aims to achieve.

## Strategic Priorities in 2021-22

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

#### Person Directed Planning Pilot

Person Directed Planning (PDP) involves assisting people with disabilities to plan, organize and access supports and services that enhance their participation in and contribution to their local community. In 2021-22, DCS continued its 18-month pilot of the Person Directed Planning Service. This service is delivered by non-governmental organizations and supports people with disabilities in creating their own personal plans to achieve their life goals, which may include social activities, employment or volunteer activities and learning opportunities. In the 2021-22 reporting period, PDP supported approximately 218 participants. An evaluation was completed at the end of the fiscal year and the results are being used to inform the next iteration of the service.

#### Shared Services Program Pilot

DCS and the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care are working together to launch a pilot program to help young adults with severe disabilities living in nursing homes to live more independently in their communities. The project was designed, and participants identified for the pilot. With a plan in place, the renovations of new accommodations started in March 2022. The pilot is ongoing, and a formal evaluation will guide future program design.

#### Development of the DSP-Children and Youth Program

In 2021-22 the Direct Family Support for Children (DFSC) program was offered by the Disability Support Program for children with disabilities and their families. DFSC provides families caring for children with disabilities at home with funding for respite based on their assessed needs. In 2021-22, there were approximately 743 families who were in receipt of DFSC respite payments.

In addition to financial supports, evidence shows that children with disabilities are more likely to achieve success when they receive services at a younger age and when their families are supported to care for them at home. DSP has designed and will implement a full range of services to shift the focus to more prevention and early intervention programming as opposed to intrusive, costlier, emergency-based services. These improvements will allow more children with disabilities to remain at home with their families in a healthy environment where their needs are met.

#### Modernization of Open Adoption Records Legislation

An *Act to Open Adoption Records in Nova Scotia* received Royal Assent in April 2021 and came into full effect on May 1, 2022. The new legislation aims to find the right balance between the needs of those seeking open adoption records and those who would like to maintain their privacy. In addition, an enhanced Disclosure Program was initiated to deliver services and supports in a trauma-informed manner, including the preparation and delivery of sensitive information, conducting searches and contacting parties to an adoption, facilitating reunion services between parties, and counselling parties on their options.

As of June 2022, 445 information requests have been received and 640 privacy tools (disclosure vetos/contact notices) have been accepted.

## Implementation of human-centred client service delivery model

A centralized intake process consisting of teams across the province, ensures one point of entry to the department for those individuals and families who are seeking financial assistance for applications under the Disability Support Program and Income Assistance program.

To continue supporting children and family connections, virtual access visits were conducted during periods of time where in person visits were not feasible.

## B. Clients will be better able to meet their basic needs

### Poverty Reduction Credit income threshold increase

The Poverty Reduction Credit provides tax-free quarterly payments to eligible low-income Nova Scotians who have been in receipt of Income Assistance for the previous tax year and who do not have children. In December 2019, the annual household income threshold to be eligible for the Poverty Reduction Credit was increased from \$12,000 to \$16,000. Eligible Nova Scotians began seeing the benefit of this increase in July 2021.

### Streamline of ESIA processes, regulations, and policy to increase access to income assistance benefits

In May 2021, the Department of Community Services increased the Standard Household Rate (SHR) by \$100/month per adult. Although increasing basic rates is one element of building income security for low-income Nova Scotians, DCS is also committed to developing new preventative and early intervention approaches and strengthening existing supports to allow clients to improve their lives and become more independent and self-sufficient.

In January 2020 the monthly Standard Household Rate Essentials Allowance of \$280 replaced a Personal Items Allowance of \$101. In April 2021 this Standard Household Rate Essentials was increased to \$380. The SHR Essentials Allowance covers basic need expenses such as food, clothing and personal items, and special needs are provided based on individual circumstances for items like transportation and medical supplies.

On July 1, 2021, the Department of Community Services removed the requirement to have a fixed address to access income assistance - providing easier access for people who are precariously housed and homeless.

### Partnerships with community partners and municipalities to identify options to expand transportation support for ESIA clients across Nova Scotia

In 2021-22 Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) worked closely with partners in Cape Breton Regional Municipality to adapt a community transportation pilot to better accommodate COVID-19 restrictions. The original concept had been based on economy of scale through shared taxis among several residents, however, the COVID-19 waves restricted that possibility. The project was able to move forward in alignment with health regulations at a reduced capacity. ESIA worked with partners in Transportation and Public Works to explore opportunities to

expand Rural Transportation services to other areas, however, COVID-19 restrictions also reduced the opportunity to test any new initiatives.

### Working with partners in government and community to provide wrap around supports for the homeless

DCS funds agencies across the province to ensure supports and services are available to individuals and families to address homelessness. DCS is committed to creating both short and long-term models for supportive housing in the province and provided \$21.3 million in funding to address homelessness through emergency shelters, housing support workers, wraparound supports and supportive housing.

Government is working towards a Supportive Housing Approach and multi-year implementation plan which will provide a comprehensive and collaborative framework for the government's approach to homelessness and supportive housing. In 2021-22, DCS funded eight homeless shelters, seven community housing organizations, and 41 housing support workers across the province.

### Initiatives to address food and energy insecurity

Through various grant programs and research-related efforts, DCS is partnering with community organizations to address food insecurity in Nova Scotia.

DCS works in partnership with Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH) on food security issues, jointly overseeing the Building Vibrant Communities Grants, and connecting community groups with the Community Food Access and Literacy Fund. The department and the Halifax Regional Municipality partner regularly to discuss collaborative options to support the most vulnerable Nova Scotians disproportionately impacted by the ongoing rising food costs. DCS is a key partner on the team working to develop a government-wide Food and Beverage Strategy.

DCS worked in partnership with the Department of Health and Wellness and Family Resource Centers across the province to offer an Isolation Food Support Program for families struggling to access food when required to self-isolate due to COVID-19. This program provided perishables, non-perishables, and essentials to families in need.

The department has recently invested in Family Resources Centers to continue food support in response to rising inflation.

DCS has been working from a food security framework that has a system of interactive and mutually reinforcing components to improve food security. The framework respects that, like many poverty-related issues, food insecurity is not the responsibility of just one department, agency, or sector; it requires many stakeholders to work together. Community-based solutions are a key component of the framework, and as such Collaborative Food Hubs (CFHs) have been funded in two communities.

- \$200,000 to launch of a Collaborative Food Hub in Eskasoni First Nation;
- \$200,000 in the launch of a Collaborative Food Hub in the Preston Township (North Preston, East Preston, and Cherrybrook).

## C. Clients are safe and supported through increased prevention and early intervention

### Expansion and enhancement of preventative, family-based programming across Nova Scotia

The enhancement and expansion of Prevention and Early Intervention (P&EI) is a multi-year initiative. This work is intended to decrease the negative social and economic impacts that more intrusive interventions can cause. Year 2 (2021-22) Child Welfare Prevention and Early Intervention enhancements include the following community-based programs:

- **Home-Based Visitation:** Implementation of seven additional Parenting Journey program units and continued implementation of the Clinical Consultation Network designed in Year 1.
- **Family Preservation:** Update to Standards and Guidelines for the existing program model, and implementation of one additional Families Plus program unit.
- **Family Violence Prevention and Early Intervention, and Father-Centric Programming:** Enhancements and updates made to the Strengthening Fathers program and implementation. This includes developing programming specific to parenting and fathers.
- **Parenting Education and Family Supports:** Development of the Family Resource Program model, implementation of enhancements at existing sites and increase in base funding.
- **Culturally Relevant and Proficient Programs and Supports:** Development and implementation of the Cultural Connector function in two P&EI sites to support creative outreach, engagement, and inclusion of African Nova Scotian families.
- **Youth Programming for Youth at Risk:** This includes two workstreams: Implementation of six additional Youth Outreach Program (YOP) sites, including expansion of YOP programming for Children in Care across the province; Development of the A Place to Belong program model and implementation of enhancements at five existing sites and two new program units.

### Creation of a Family Connections Program

Government ended the practice of the use of birth alerts on December 1, 2021 and created a Family Connections program to refer high-needs expectant families to community partners. Participation in Family Connections is voluntary, and consent from the expectant family is given. If there are needs after a child is born, the community partners and DCS will continue to work with families to mitigate risk and ensure the safety and well-being of children.

As of March 2022, over 30 expectant families have received support from the Family Connections Coordinator.

Ending this practice aligns with recommendations of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

## Enhancement and diversification of options to respond to the needs of children, youth and families

The department is expanding and diversifying options to respond the needs of children and families. In 2021-22, the department:

- Provided continued support for seven youth in individual living arrangements.
- Continued to make improvements to the Alternative Family Care (AFC) program which 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. In 2021-22, 496 approved caregivers with 764 children participated in AFC. Work is underway to create a solution that reduces the financial burdens caregivers experience, while streamlining operations for Social Workers who process exception payments.
- Selected the Attachment Regulation and Competency (ARC) Therapeutic Framework as the therapeutic model for care at Wood Street Campus and began planning for implementation. ARC is a framework for intervention with children, youth and families who have experienced multiple and/or prolonged traumatic stress. ARC identifies three core domains that are frequently impacted among traumatized children and youth, and which are relevant to future resiliency: Attachment, Regulation, & Competency.
- In June 2021, the Service Delivery division created an African Nova Scotian supervisory position that is supporting a team of social workers of African Nova Scotian descent which will provide cultural advice and guidance to all social workers working with children, youth and families of African descent. This will:
  - improve child welfare service experience for our children, youth, and families of African descent;
  - enhance cultural understanding and skills development among social workers supporting these families;
  - provide a second supervisor, per CYFS policy, for reviewing cases; and
  - support the strategic plan and objectives of the department's Inclusion, Diversity and Community Relation division.

## Foster care redesign

Foster families are a key pillar of Nova Scotia's child welfare system. They provide love, security and a strong foundation for the province's most vulnerable children. To strengthen support for foster families and the children in their care, the Province is investing up to \$34 million over three years in a redesign of Nova Scotia's foster care system, creating a modern and sustainable system that provides families and children the supports they need to flourish.

The redesign includes new financial supports and an immediate increase in per diem rates by \$15 a day (effective November 1, 2021). It also includes:

- enhanced supports for foster parents experiencing allegations investigations;
- implementation of a foster care hub model approach;
- implementation of new foster care placement types;
- implementation of new financial supports;

- creation of a mechanism to engage youth currently in care or formerly in care to inform change; and
- creation of new recruitment and retention strategies.

### Preventative employment-focussed supports and services for youth-in-care and dependents of clients receiving supports from ESIA and DSP

In collaboration with community, Employment Support Services (ESS) provides a continuum of Prevention and Early Intervention supports to decrease dependency on income assistance and break the cycle of intergenerational reliance on ESIA. Prevention and Early Intervention programming aims to build connections to community, enhance self-confidence, provide career exploration, work experience and support participation in post-secondary.

Examples of Prevention and Early Intervention programs include:

- **Culturally responsive services for Indigenous communities:** ESS is currently working with the Native Council of Nova Scotia to deliver employment programming to urban Indigenous Nova Scotians and to pilot a program to support Indigenous youth to transition to employment and post-secondary education.
- **Youth Development Initiative:** Funds career-focused, community-based projects and wage subsidies for youth ages 16 to 20 who are attached to DCS. Delivered in partnership with community service providers and employers throughout the province. In 2021-22, just under 300 youth participated.
- **Educate to Work for Dependents of ESIA clients:** Addresses intergenerational poverty issues by supporting ESIA dependents in achieving long-term labour market attachment through post-secondary education at the Nova Scotia Community College. In 2021-22, 25 youth participated. Delivered in partnership with the Department of Labour, Skills and Innovation through the Labour Market Development Agreement.
- **Digital Skills2SucSEED Pilot:** Provides virtual employment-focused support to youth living in child caring facilities or in foster care to transition to labour market attachment and/or post-secondary. Delivered in partnership with Society for Enterprise Education and Development (SEED). Supports up to 100 youth in peer groups and includes participation incentives.
- **Career Rising:** A comprehensive summer work program delivered in rural communities in partnership with the Nova Scotia Cooperative Council. Up to 90 youth ages 15 to 19 are provided holistic, wrap-around, and year-round programming through five sites. The program provides the opportunity to learn employability skills, connect to community, save for post-secondary and meet local industry labour market needs.
- **Inspiring Success:** Provides government work experience to DCS-attached youth and sponsored post-secondary students. In 2021-22 24 youth participated.
- **Immigrant Youth Career Exploration Program:** In partnership with ISANS, immigrant and refugee youth attached to DCS are supported with employability training and work experience. In 2021-22, 77 youth participated.
- Additional cross-departmental partnerships provide opportunities for youth in sectoral workforce development programs including as follows:



- **Matrix CODE** - African Nova Scotian youth with experiences in the justice system are provided training in code, wraparound supports, a living allowance, mentorship from African Nova Scotian community leaders, and mental and physical fitness supports. The program also provides a three-month paid internship with Nova Scotian IT employers with the goal of full-time employment, starting a business, or further education and training. Funded by the Departments of Communities, Culture, Tourism & Heritage, Labour, Skills & Immigration and Community Services.
- **NPower Canada** – A national program that provides low-income youth with free in-demand digital and professional skills training and connects them to career opportunities with some of Canada’s largest employers. Funded by the Department of Labour, Skills & Immigration, with referrals from Community Services.
- **AspireAtlantic Pilot** - A sectoral workforce development program with the primary goal to move unemployed and low-wage working populations into specific sectors with middle-skill job vacancies. Funded by the Department of Labour, Skills & Immigration and the federal government, with referrals from Community Services.

Please note, the 2021-22 number of program participants are lower than usual due to COVID-19.

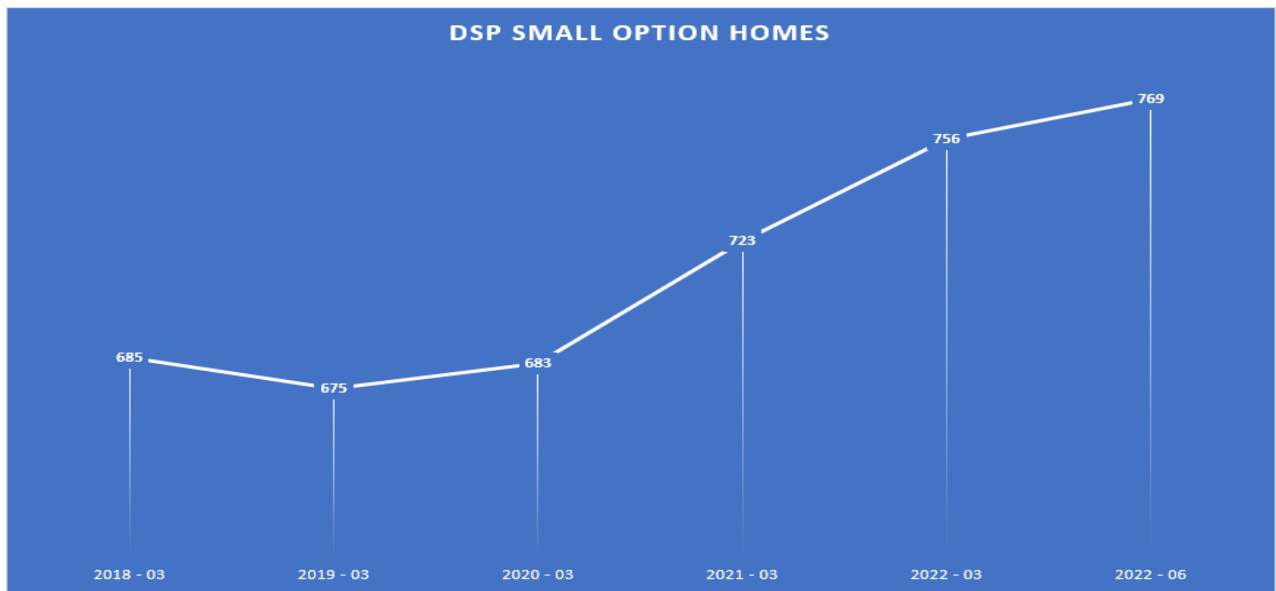
## D. Clients will be more included in their communities

### Transition to community living for persons with disabilities

For the 2021-22 fiscal year \$27.8 million was dedicated to moving people to community. This is a multi-year project and government is committed to closing large facilities. In 2021-22 135 placements were created in community-based programs.

The first facility identified for closure is Harbourside Lodge, Adult Residential Centre in Yarmouth. Work is underway to create ten new Small Option Homes to support 22 Harbourside participants and 18 others moving out of Adult Residential Centres and Regional Rehabilitation Centres (ARC/RRCs). These new homes are set to open by the end of 2022. The locations of the homes, as well as the service providers who will operate them, were chosen by the residents themselves. The homes will be located in Yarmouth, Shelburne, Bridgewater, Annapolis Valley, Digby and HRM. In 2021-22, 82.74% of DSP participants live in community.





### Design and construction of modular homes for participants living with disabilities

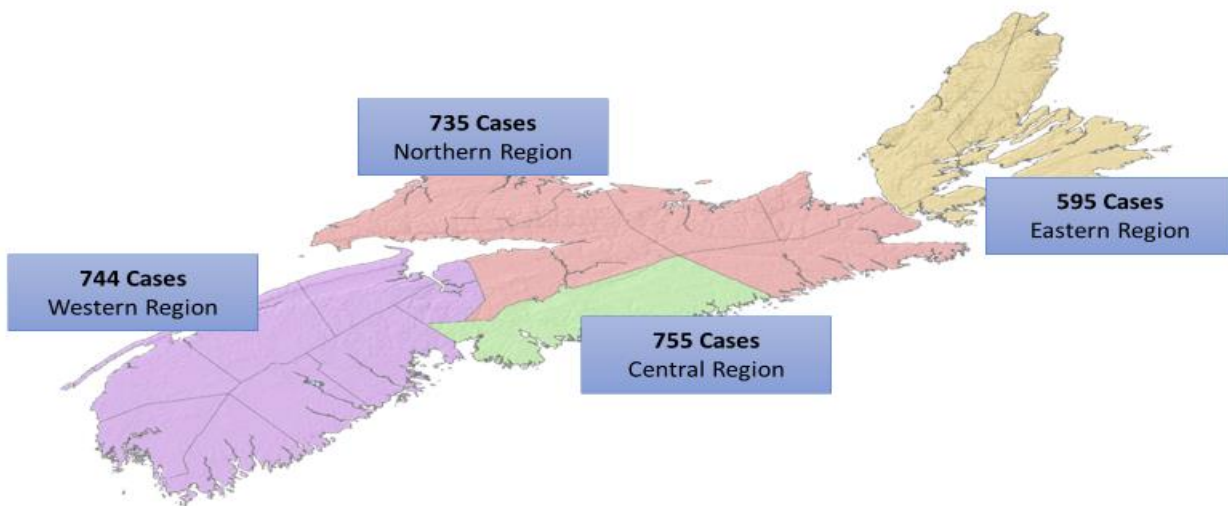
In 2021-22, the Disability Support Program began work to procure the designs of modular homes for DSP residential programs. Input from current residents and staff was sought to inform the designs.

Support DSP clients in transiting to community-based living with increased community-based supports and independent living options

DCS continues to work with participants and families to move participants into community-based living across the province, and expand community-based supports and independent living options to help address the service request list. In 2021-22, an additional 135 individuals were supported in community-based living programs.

## E. Employment and income support will be proactive, practical, and targeted

### Average Monthly Employment Support Services Caseload: 2021-2022



### Expansion of the Edge Pilot Program

EDGE is an early intervention pilot project for youth attached to ESIA or CYFS, and youth-at-risk between the ages of 18-26. Sites in North End Halifax and Sydney have helped to expand the program's reach into African Nova Scotia communities. EDGE is an innovative, one-door approach to pre-employment and post-placement retention support delivered in peer groups, supported through individualized mentorship and mental health clinicians. There are a total of six sites delivered in partnership with John Howard Society (New Glasgow), Cape Breton YMCA (Sydney), Greater Halifax YMCA (North End), Metroworks (Bridgewater and Halifax sites); and Community Inc/Youth Portal (Kentville) which support 300 youth annually.

### Development of employment program for African Nova Scotians living with a disability

The Youth Development Initiative for African Nova Scotian Youth Pilot provides funding to service providers to deliver youth-focused Africentric programming in African Nova Scotian communities across Nova Scotia. It is delivered in partnership with the Association of Black Social Workers and community service providers throughout the province. In 2021-22, 250 youth received support through local community projects. The department has committed to annual funding for this initiative.

### Train employees in client centred case management approaches

ESIA is undertaking a multi-year initiative to implement a client-centred case management approach across its programs and services. It is focused on staff training initiatives and specific skills development that will help frontline staff to better understand and support individual client

challenges and needs. The planning began in 2021-22 with concept-testing scheduled to begin in the following year.

## F. Programs and services will be delivered more efficiently

### Implementation of new evidence-based assessment tool for adults living with disabilities

In 2021-22, DCS tested a new evidenced-based assessment tool with approximately 420 adults with disabilities. The data gathered during this testing phase will be used to inform policy to provide a more efficient and equitable distribution of programs and services. The next steps are to use this data to develop policies and implement this assessment across the province.

### Modernization of telephone services and development of new digital service channel

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need to offer digital services and accelerate the department's digital transformation. The department continues to make efforts to diversify its service delivery channels to include services by phone, digitally, as well as in-person delivery. Planning has begun to create a digital service channel which will allow clients to access supports efficiently.

### Expansion of the Collaborative Case Management (CCM) system for access and transportation scheduling across the province, Disability Support Program services and income assistance

The Department's new Collaborative Case Management IT system continues to be developed to support better client service and internal efficiencies. Multiple services have been developed and implemented on the CCM platform, starting with an assessment tool for DSP participants. The Access and Transportation program was rolled out province-wide and continues to evolve. In addition, the online form for intake is targeted to go live to the public in the fall of 2022 and is currently in use by staff and a select group of service providers. New functionality is planned for implementation to allow clients to further engage with DCS electronically.

### DCS supported community connections to ensure services are human-centered, trauma informed and culturally responsive

Anti-Black racism training and ongoing education with all staff, as well as the creation of a Africentric Child Welfare team ensures a culturally appropriate lens is being applied to all cases involving children, youth and families to create successful outcomes across all programming.

Changes made through Employment Supports and Services has led to increasing the benefits and supports to clients by working with service providers to build projects that align with individual skills and experiences.

## G. Strengthened relationships with African Nova Scotian Communities

Led by the Inclusion, Diversity and Community Relations division, DCS continues its engagement with African Nova Scotian communities across the province in an effort to better address the unique needs of African Nova Scotian children, youth, and families. The department continues to work with its partners to deliver on *Count Us In: Nova Scotia's Action Plan in Response to the International Decade for People of African Descent*. This includes working with all departments to improve education, health and economic outcomes by addressing systemic racism, inequity and their impacts.

In partnership with community, DCS has developed an anti-Black racism strategy to address systemic racism and discrimination. The Department is committed to continuing to work toward achieving a culturally responsive and anti-racist workforce, that will create safe spaces for African Nova Scotian staff, community members, and clients. The results of this work will positively impact African Nova Scotians accessing our programs and services.

### Culturally appropriate youth programming

In 2021-22, DCS made progress in using a trauma-informed and culturally appropriate approach across its programs: For example:

- As part of a larger effort, DSP launched a new referral program to increase diversity among staff. In addition, there are new standards for community homes for children and youth that require our residential service providers to have cultural competency training and a policy on anti-black racism. In the coming year, DSP will develop similar standards for adult homes.
- ESIA has focused its efforts on creating safe spaces and specialized programs to help youth cope with systemic racism and overcome societal barriers. This includes requiring an Africentric approach within the EDGE Pilot Program to reach more African Nova Scotia youth, as well as dedicated programs such as Matrix CODE (funded by Labour, Skills & Immigration) and Youth Development Initiative for African Nova Scotian Youth.

### Implementation of the recommendations from the “Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children Restorative Inquiry”

DCS continues to work with our community partners on the path forward outlined by the Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children Restorative Inquiry. In 2021-22, planning began to develop a Child and Youth Commission. The commission will be completely independent of government and will be guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### Improve access to and collection of disaggregated data

DCS recognizes the need to improve race-based data collection to better inform policies, programs, and services, and improve systems accountability for Nova Scotians. DCS conducted a review of its data collection practices and has initiated a project to improve its race-based data collection.

These efforts are in keeping with the *Dismantling Racism and Hate Act* introduced in March 2022.

## Ongoing employee development to address anti-Black racism

In April 2021, DCS made anti-Black racism policy training mandatory for all DCS employees by September 2021. During this time, approximately 83% of staff members completed eLearning courses on the DCS anti-Black racism policy. The remaining 17% will be completed this fiscal year. In addition, DCS leaders undertook specialized training to host conversations and support the implementation of the anti-Black racism policy. This also included a coaching skills course for supervisors and managers. There have been several managerial level positions designated within DCS. The department continues to work with the Nova Scotia Government Employees Union in designating bargaining unit positions.

In fall 2019, two Morning Cafés were held to connect with members of African Nova Scotian Communities. This community engagement forum provided an opportunity for departmental staff to strengthen relationships with members of African Nova Scotian communities. In March 2020, a Morning Café was held in Kentville, prior to the implementation of the COVID-19 health protocols. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Morning Cafes were paused in 2021-22.

## Africentric program review and engagement

The Africentric review of the Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) program is a key piece of the department's work to ensure the ESIA program reflects, supports, and acknowledges the distinct needs of the African Nova Scotian communities. An Africentric lens was used to help identify the historical mistreatment, racial profiling, and systemic racism faced by African Nova Scotian staff and clients.

The Africentric Review was undertaken with the Association of Black Social Workers to identify the gaps, barriers and challenges impacting the African Nova Scotian communities we serve.

The Review resulted in 16 recommendations that will prioritize the voices of African Nova Scotian and Persons of African Descent staff and community members within the ESIA program and create mechanisms to ensure their perspectives and experiences are integrated into the everyday work of the program.

The department is implementing these recommendations over time, guided by an external Advisory Committee made of up African Nova Scotian community leaders and staff.

To increase staff diversity, DSP instituted a referral bonus for African Nova Scotia community groups that refer successful applicants that stay employed for six months and over.

During 2021-22, DSP completed preparatory work for an Africentric Engagement project. It aims to:

- share information about DSP and its related programs and services with people of African descent across Nova Scotia;
- build better relationships between DSP and people of African descent, which may result in more culturally responsive and inclusive programming and policy; and
- develop a summary report outlining learnings from community engagements.

The Africentric Engagement is based on three principles. First, it recognizes the historical impacts of ongoing oppressions and institutional racism within the department. Second, it will be guided

and informed by an Africentric Worldview. And third, it will be different from past engagements, with an emphasis on taking time to listen and build genuine relationships.

## H. 2020 Mandated Children and Family Services Act Review recommendations

A mandated review of the *Children and Family Services Act (CFSA)* was completed in 2020/21. The review was conducted by a team made up of staff from the Departments of Community Services and Justice, and Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services, and takes into account African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw perspectives.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a targeted review of specific sections of the Act was undertaken. These areas were: duty to report third-party abuse; prohibition on publications; and the child abuse registry.

The results of the review were released publicly March 1, 2021, as required by the *CFSA*. The report included 21 recommendations for:

- more culturally responsive and duty to report abuse education and awareness for social workers, stakeholders, and the public;
- more consistency, clarification / improvements to policies and processes;
- better working relationships with key partners such as police and Public Prosecution Services;
- amendments to the *CFSA* to enable conditional and absolute discharges to result in registration in the Child Abuse Register;
- changes to address structural or systemic racism in existing policies and / or processes for reporting and / or investigating allegations of child abuse by third parties; and
- to conduct a broader review that incorporates diverse stakeholder perspectives and addresses the additional elements identified through this review process.

These recommendations have been prioritized and are being reviewed for action/implementation. The department has begun planning for the next review scheduled for 2024.

## Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women

### Overview and Mandate

The mandate of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women (Status of Women) is to bring issues affecting the lives of women and girls in Nova Scotia to the forefront of government. The Status of Women office supports the Advisory Council, appointees to which are drawn from the diversity of women across Nova Scotia.

The Status of Women office provides research, policy advice, and information services in pursuit of equality for all women in Nova Scotia. To advance this mandate, the Status of Women office works collaboratively with government departments, agencies, academia,

community groups, and women-serving organizations.

### Strategic Priorities in 2021-22

To advance a vision of a gender equal Nova Scotia, the Status of Women office's priorities for 2021-22 were:

- ensuring that women and their children are safe from gender-based violence;
- strengthening women's economic security; and
- encouraging women's participation in leadership.

### Standing Together to prevent domestic violence

Over the last three years, Standing Together has provided grants and supported collaborations to enable community groups, organizations, and government partners to test new ideas and explore best practices for preventing domestic violence, supporting victims, and ultimately changing outcomes for women, girls, families, and communities. To date, Standing Together has supported over 80 initiatives, projects, and prototypes. The focus is to establish a deeper understanding of this complex issue and what it will take to create the conditions for change.

To determine and guide our actions and priorities going forward, Standing Together has been working differently with community and government partners. These efforts have focused on learning and evidence to better understand how to prevent and disrupt cycles of violence, building relationships and capacity to change, and recognizing our shared responsibility to make things different. The overarching intent is to support a shift to prevention.

### Atlantic Domestic Homicide Review Network

The mandate of the Atlantic Domestic Homicide Review Network (the Network) is to bring together experts from across the region to conduct in-depth analysis of information from death reviews from across the region. The Network is expected to identify trends and improvements to system responses, promote cross-collaboration between government agencies, and provide opportunities to hear from community agencies and individuals with lived experience.

The Network held its first meeting virtually in April of 2021. Since that time, the Network has begun a research project titled "Preventing Domestic Homicides in Atlantic Canada: Looking back to see our way forward".

### Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

The Minister responsible for the Advisory Council for the Status of Women is government's ministerial lead on a coordinated response to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Calls for Justice. The principles that guided Nova Scotia's approach throughout the Inquiry – honouring relationships, keeping families at the centre, collaboration, and partnership – continue to inform our work to respond to the Calls for Justice.

Nova Scotia Native Women's Association (NSNWA) has been identified as the lead by the Mi'kmaq, and is working closely with families, communities, and organizations. The NSNWA hosted their first Mawio'mi in September 2021 to provide a safe space to empower women, girls, and two-spirited to gather, share, engage, and support one another.



In November 2021, the Province ended the use of birth alerts, and enhanced supports for families through the new Family Connections Program. Indigenous-led work is underway to engage with Mi'kmaw women about traditional birthing practices and ceremonies.

The Jane Paul Indigenous Women's Resource Centre continues to provide supports to Indigenous women off-reserve in Sydney, many of whom live with complex and intersecting realities of homelessness, poverty, violence, addiction, and multiple system interactions.

## Advancement of Accessibility Commitments

DCS is committed to creating diverse and inclusive spaces for both clients and staff. The strategy is twofold. Externally, DCS hosts a suite of programs and services that helps people with disabilities maintain an independent lifestyle in community. Internally, DCS is an active member of the Accessibility Directorate ([Accessibility Directorate - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada](#)) and will support the implementation of the Government Accessibility Plan. Within this framework, DCS has committed to:

- continuing to increase and improve access to information, training, and resources to establish a workplace culture that is safe, supportive, and inclusive for all;
- implementing strategies to diversify its workforce and will identify and support the current needs of employment equity employees, particularly persons with both visible and less visible disabilities;
- working with the Accessibility Directorate to develop and implement employment accessibility standards; and
- identifying and building partnerships with existing community groups and organizations to ensure programs and communications are accessible and sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities.

DCS has already started work in these areas, with a focus on resource materials and training. In 2021-22, 665 DCS employees have taken the course, Introduction to Disability, and further promotion of the training is planned for the coming year.



# 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 2021-22
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.