



Business Plan

2021–22

Community Services



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Message from the Minister



At the Department of Community Services, we believe all Nova Scotians want to achieve independence, provide for themselves and their families, and contribute to their communities.

This year, we will work collaboratively across government to do more for those who need it the most.

Poverty is a long-term and complex issue, with no simple solutions or quick fixes. We continue to invest in making life more affordable for low-income Nova Scotians. Recent examples include increasing and expanding the Nova Scotia Child Benefit and increasing Income Assistance rates through the Standard Household Rate. In the coming year, we will continue to work with our partners and make investments to ensure that all Nova Scotians have greater opportunity to provide for themselves and their families, to contribute to their communities, and to lead fulfilling lives.

Our Disability Support Program is committed to supporting the well being of people living with disabilities and providing opportunities for growth—whether that’s community living, volunteering, or skill-building for future employment. The number of clients moving to community-based independent living will increase over the next several years. The transition to community will be driven by participant choice. It will involve conversation and planning with participants and their families as Nova Scotia moves away from a model that relies on large residential institutions.

Safe and healthy children, youth, and families are key to building an even stronger Nova Scotia. The emotional, social and physical development of young children has a direct impact on their overall development and on the adult they will become. That is why important work will continue to attract new foster families and to ensure they have the training and support they need to, in turn, care for our most vulnerable children and youth.

The past year has shone a spotlight on the deep divide that exists in our society—here in Nova Scotia and across the world in terms of racial inequity. We cannot ignore the fact that Black/African Nova Scotians face particular and unique risks, every single day, at work and in their communities. As a department we have been focused on advancing work on an *anti-Black racism strategy*. That work will continue in the year ahead.

Having a place to call home is fundamental. To help more people find stable, supportive and long-term housing, government made the single largest investment in homelessness in the province’s history in budget 20-21. The Integrated Action Plan to Address Homelessness seeks to understand and address homelessness through wraparound supports, by working in partnership with other levels of government, the shelter community, and other important non-governmental partners.

The Status of Women office works across government and with communities to advance equality for women and girls in Nova Scotia. In 2021-2022, we will work collaboratively to strengthen economic security for women, encourage leadership opportunities, and partner on projects to address and prevent domestic violence.

As Minister, I am pleased to present this 2021-2022 Business Plan for Community Services and the Status of Women office. I encourage you to read on and learn more about our work.

Department of Community Services Annual Plan 2021-22

In closing, I would like to thank the staff of Community Services and the Status of Women office and all our partners in service delivery. Their enthusiasm, commitment and compassion drive our overall success in serving Nova Scotians.

Thank you.

Honourable Kelly Regan, Deputy Premier

Minister of Community Services

Minister responsible for the *Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act*

Strategic Priorities in 2021-22

In 2021-22, the Department will continue to implement strategic changes to its programs and services in alignment with Government's priorities. These key initiatives will focus on priority themes that support key client and departmental outcomes.

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

The Department of Community Services (DCS) will support its clients to increase their independence, so they can meaningfully make their own decisions and pursue their own interests.

- In partnership with service providers, DCS will continue to pilot a new evidence-based Person-Directed Planning Service in the Disability Support Program (DSP). This service will help participants identify and work toward their own life ambitions by enabling more choice and control over services and supports received.
- As part of government's priority to promote health equity and positively influence the social determinants of health, DCS will partner with the Department of Health and Wellness to pilot a shared services program to enable young adults with chronic illnesses and physical disabilities who require nursing support to live independently in the community. Participants will have the supports they need, preventing the need for more costly, intrusive services that would otherwise be needed through a Long-Term Care facility
- DCS will continue to explore the development of a range of services for children and youth living with disabilities to avoid or delay their placement in out-of-home settings. The implementation of a new assessment tool will be explored to help staff better determine needs of children and youth to provide them with appropriate supports and services.
- DCS will modernize the Province's adoption legislation.
- DCS will continue to review the various methods of delivering services in its field offices and take tangible action to make changes to teams and processes that will result in a strong human-centred focused service delivery unit. DCS will establish consolidated provincial services in key areas to provide a client experience that is prompt, responsible and informative.

Clients will be better able to meet their basic needs

DCS will continue to help clients better meet their basic needs through increased financial and non-financial supports.

- 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 will begin seeing the benefit of this increase starting in July 2021.

- The Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) program will review policy and regulations that present challenges to vulnerable Nova Scotians seeking to access income assistance benefits. Action will be taken to streamline processes and ensure supports are available to those who most need them.
- ESIA will focus on working closely with municipalities and community partners across the province on the identification of opportunities to expand transportation support to ESIA clients.
- DCS will continue to work with partners within and beyond government to understand and address homelessness through wrap-around supports. This includes continued implementation of a five-year Integrated Action Plan to Address Homelessness. This \$20.5 million dollar investment focusses on front line supports to connect individuals in need to stable and safe homes.
- Through collaboration across government and with the community sector to reduce poverty in Nova Scotia, DCS and the Office of Strategy Management (OSM) are co-leading a whole-of-government approach to reducing poverty in Nova Scotia. Together with partner departments, multiple sectors and community, work is underway to test innovative projects, examine practices in other jurisdictions, and develop capacity in communities across the province. During this final year of the poverty reduction initiative, the goal of improving social and economic outcomes for Nova Scotians will continue to be a priority as learnings are applied from the almost two hundred projects completed with the investment.
- DCS will work with partner departments to address energy poverty and to create healthy, just and sustainable food systems that improve food security for vulnerable Nova Scotians.

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

DCS will work toward ensuring clients are safe from abuse and violence, and provided with preventative programming and early intervention.

- DCS will expand and enhance preventative, family-based programming across Nova Scotia to respond to the needs of children, youth and families who are at increased risk of child protection involvement. Key areas of focus will include family preservation, parenting education, family violence prevention, cultural relevance, and specialized training and professional development for staff supporting children, youth and families. Enhanced programming will represent a fundamental shift from a crisis-driven child welfare system to a more proactive and preventative one.
- DCS will continue to enhance and diversify placement options for children and youth in care, including the improvement of accessibility to existing supports and services and the identification of opportunities to enhance service delivery. In 2021-22, the Department will work with new and existing service providers to expand on specialized placement options for children in care.
- DCS will build on current work to attract, retain and invest in foster families across Nova Scotia through a redesign of the foster care system. This initiative will seek to improve supports to foster families and enhance awareness of the need to recruit foster families

within both rural and urban settings. More foster families will enable more children in care to remain within their community with focused supports from a foster family.

- Preventive supports and services will continue to be provided to youth-in-care and dependents of clients receiving support from the Employment Support and Income Assistance Program and the Disability Support Program. These supports and services for youth will be provided in partnership with community youth-serving organizations.

Clients will be more included in their communities

Clients will be included in their communities so that they have opportunities to participate in employment, volunteer work, and cultural, recreational, and social events.

- Working with participants and families, DCS will continue to close large, congregate living sites and transition adults with disabilities to more independent, community-based living. This will be done as the Province phases out large residential institutions known as Adult Residential Centres (ARC) and Regional Rehabilitation Centres (RRC) for persons with disabilities. The first of these facilities to close will be Harbourside Lodge ARC in Yarmouth. DCS will continue to work with residents and their families at this facility to transition everyone to appropriate homes in the community.
- Due to the number of homes that will be needed to enable people to live in community, DCS is procuring the design and construction of modular (prefabricated) homes. This will ensure that homes are built in an efficient manner and are designed in a way that supports persons with disabilities and their expressed needs.
- Working with participants and families, DSP will move participants into community-based living across the province and will also expand community-based supports and independent living options to help address our service request list.

More clients will be attached to the labour market

For those who can work, opportunities for employment can mean independence, self-sufficiency, as well as economic and social security.

- The Department continues to support youth who are at risk of dependence on income assistance. The EDGE Pilot, an early intervention program for youth ages 18-26, will expand to support more vulnerable young people across the province. The pilot provides wrap-around employment-focused support to youth experiencing poverty-related barriers and will expand to four new locations: Bridgewater, New Glasgow, Sydney, and North End Halifax. Eligibility will expand to include youth at risk of attaching to Income Assistance and youth transitioning out of care. Additionally, the expanded pilot will explore a digital version of program delivery to meet the needs of youth in underserved areas and will evaluate the integration of mental health supports.
- Investments through the Workforce Development Agreement will support development of the Department's first employment program specifically designed for African Nova Scotians living with a disability. Led by the Association of Black Social Workers, the program and supports will be community designed and delivered to meet the unique needs of our province's African Nova Scotian communities. Additionally, the Workforce Development Agreement will provide funding to support employment-focused programming for persons living with Autism and youth living in child caring facilities.

- The Department will continue the efforts to ensure we are working within a client-centred case management approach. New investments in staff training initiatives and specific skills development will help frontline staff to better understand and support individual client challenges and needs.

Programs and services will be delivered more efficiently and effectively

DCS will work toward delivering programs and services to Nova Scotians with more efficient and effective use of departmental resources.

- DCS will implement a new, evidence-based assessment tool for adults with disabilities. This new assessment will lead to a more equitable and efficient delivery of services in the Disability Support Program.
- DCS will launch a provincial intake team to streamline the application process for Nova Scotians seeking service from the Employment Support and Income Assistance Program or the Disability Support Program. This will allow citizens seeking supports to receive human-centred service through a range of online or in-person channels, and will enable the Department to provide a stronger, more coordinated client service experience for people.
- DCS will diversify its service delivery channels by offering services by phone and digitally, in addition to in-person delivery that currently exists. The Department's telephone services will be modernized, and a new digital service channel will be built to provide better overall client experience.
- The Department's new Collaborative Case Management (CCM) IT system will be leveraged to support better client service and internal efficiencies. In 2019/20, this system was launched at one site, with the intention to expand across the province, for use in managing the access and transportation schedule for visitations between children and youth in care and their parent(s) or other family members. Further enhancements to the access and transportation module are planned for 2021-22 based on learnings from the initial implementation phase.
- CCM will also be used to enable the provincial intake process, to provide a more advanced tool for assessing the needs of participants acquiring services from the Disability Support Program and in establishing an online presence for income assistance clients, enabling them to access their account information remotely, anytime, anyplace.
- DCS will continue to maintain connections to community organizations and service providers to ensure that our programs and services are human centered, trauma informed and culturally responsive.

The Department will work to strengthen relationships with African Nova Scotian communities

DCS will continue its meaningful engagement with African Nova Scotian communities across the Province and work to better address the unique needs of African Nova Scotian children, youth, and families. 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. Initiatives include:
 - Youth outreach and community programs that will focus on sexual violence prevention and a focus on culturally appropriate programming across the department.
 - Continued work with our community partners on the path forward outlined by the Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children Restorative Inquiry;
 - Striving to deliver on Government's *Count Us In: Nova Scotia's Action Plan in Response to the International Decade for People of African Descent* by implementing initiatives between staff and community partners aimed at improving services and supports to African Nova Scotians.
 - The Disability Support Program will implement a number of initiatives to support residential service providers in addressing anti-Black Racism in the services they provide on behalf of DCS, such as ensuring program resources are culturally appropriate and providing participants with opportunities to engage with their cultural communities.
 - Work to improve access to disaggregated data, which is necessary to advance equity and understanding, and to support ongoing improvements to departmental policies, programs and data collection from an Africentric perspective.
 - Ongoing employee development to address anti-Black racism. This includes:
 - All DCS staff and those in leadership positions will undertake training regarding anti-Black racism. Employees will also incorporate personal goals into their performance workplans to address anti-Black racism.
 - The Department has designated several positions for African Nova Scotian candidates, including managerial levels; and more African Nova Scotian employees will be participating in Leadership Development programs.
- In fall 2019, two Morning Cafés were held to connect with member of African Nova Scotian Communities. The Cafés, held in Halifax and Dartmouth, were well attended, and showcased programs and services offered by the department and encouraged feedback from community members. This community engagement forum provided an opportunity for departmental staff to strengthen relationships with members of the African Nova Scotian communities. In March 2020, a Morning Café was held in Kentville, prior to the implementation of the COVID-19 health protocols. In 2021, DCS will explore a provincial virtual approach to the Morning Café forums to provide information across the province, in partnership with African Nova Scotian communities.
- An Africentric Review of the Employment Support and Income Assistance Program is being conducted to ensure that African Nova Scotian clients are supported and well-served by the program. This review involves the identification and elimination of racism within program policies, processes, and service delivery, and the removal of systemic barriers by addressing program and policy gaps and will serve as a model for other program reviews. Africentric reviews of the Disability Support Program and the Child, Youth and Family Supports program are also planned.

Mandated *Children and Family Services Act* Review

In 2021-22, the Department will begin actioning recommendations resulting from the mandated review of the *Children and Family Services Act* that began in fall 2020. This review is focused on three sections of the *Act*; duty to report third-party abuse, prohibition on publications, and the child abuse register. The recommendations will identify policy and practice improvements, which will benefit the overall well-being of Nova Scotian children, youth and families involved with Child Welfare.

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 current priorities are:

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

In 2021-22, the Status of Women office will advance several key initiatives including:

Standing Together: A Provincial Action Plan to Prevent Domestic Violence

Status of Women is leading the development of Standing Together: a provincial action plan to prevent domestic violence. Launched in fall 2018, work with community organizations and departments continues toward the development of a provincial plan to break harmful cycles of domestic violence and prevent violence from occurring in the first place. This coordinated approach focuses on improving the province's support infrastructure, strengthening the continuum of programs available for victims, and investing in innovation to understand what changes could be made to prioritize prevention.

The development of the Action Plan is modeling restorative and relational approaches to build a coordinated forward path for Nova Scotia. Building on learnings from the work underway and

through a comprehensive evaluation and learning framework, the next phase will focus on leveraging insights and outcomes from grants, collaborations, pilot projects, and prototypes; building shared understanding; and planning and action for change.

Atlantic Domestic Homicide Review Network

The Status of Women office will work with its counterparts in the Atlantic provinces to steward the establishment of the Atlantic Domestic Homicide Review Network. Through data-driven policy analysis, this network will recommend systemic improvements to further prevent domestic violence in Atlantic Canada.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

The Status of Women office is coordinating the province's work with the Mi'kmaw and other provincial departments (including the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Community Services, Justice, and Intergovernmental Affairs) on the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG).

In 2021-22, the Status of Women office will continue to collaborate with the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association, Mi'kmaw leadership, and communities and families to develop a forward path to take action, support families, raise awareness, and commemorate the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Nova Scotia.

This work includes coordination with Federal-Provincial-Territorial and Indigenous groups regarding the development of a National Action Plan on MMIWG and identifying opportunities for action and change.

In addition, and in support of the initiatives above, the Status of Women office will:

- positively influencing the social determinants of health for women and girls by working in partnership with the Department of Health and Wellness;
- engage with other departments to address the impacts of inequity on women and girls; and
- enable access to disaggregated data to advance equity for women and girls.

Departmental Expenses Summary

Departmental Expenses Summary (\$ thousands)			
<u>Programs and Services</u>	2020-21 Estimate	2020-21 Forecast	2021-22 Estimate
Senior Management	974	1,141	1,208
Policy and Innovation	10,947	11,619	8,398
Corporate Services Unit	4,355	4,775	4,362
Service Delivery	94,358	97,782	108,748
Strategic Services	11,927	13,183	11,299
Disability Support Program	389,509	424,844	449,592
Child, Youth and Family Support Program	105,086	123,194	123,054
Employment Services and Income Assistance Program	372,228	350,326	406,459
Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women	12,818	13,622	11,194
Total - Departmental Expenses	1,002,202	1,040,486	1,124,314
Ordinary Recoveries	15,786	22,794	18,721
Funded Staff (# of FTEs) Department Funded Staff	1,533.7	1,598.7	1,585.5

Note:

For Ordinary Revenues, see Estimates and Supplementary Detail Book, Chapter 2.
For TCA Purchase Requirements, see Estimates and Supplementary Detail Book, Chapter 1