



ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

2024-25

Opportunities and Social
Development

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Accountability Report 2024–2025

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Table of Contents

Accountability Statement2
Introduction3
Measuring Performance.....3
Priority Areas in 2024-25:3
A. Strategic Initiatives.....3
B. Child and Family Wellbeing Program (CFW)3
C. Disability Support Program (DSP).....5
D. Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA)6
Status of Women Office.....8
Status of Women Priority Areas in 2024-25:8
A. Transition Houses and Women’s Centres.....8
B. Women-centred Approaches to Safety & Preventing Gender-based Violence.....8
C. Economic Security & Leadership.....9
Financial Results 11
Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act..... 13

Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of the Department of Opportunities and Social Development for the year ended March 31, 2025, is prepared pursuant to the *Finance Act* and government policies and guidelines. The reporting of the Department of Opportunities and Social Development outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments, and opinions by the Department of Opportunities and Social Development management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of the Department of Opportunities and Social Development 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 2024-25 Business Plan.

Original signed by:

Honourable Scott Armstrong
Minister of Opportunities and Social Development

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

Craig Beaton
Deputy Minister of Opportunities and Social Development

Introduction

The mandate of the Department of Opportunities and Social Development is to provide effective supports and assistance for people in need so they can live more independent and healthier lives. In December 2024, the Department of Community Services was renamed to the Department of Opportunities and Social Development. This Accountability Report presents key investments and accomplishments that supported implementation of priorities identified in the Department of Community Services' 2024-25 Business Plan.

Measuring Performance

Priority Areas in 2024-25:

A. Strategic Initiatives

With continued investment in the Nova Scotia Child Benefit (NSCB), on average, 39,799 children / 21,810 families per month were supported by the benefit in 2024-25. The NSCB is a tax-free monthly benefit intended to help all low-income Nova Scotian families, including OSD clients, offset the cost of raising children under the age of 18.

The Department continued to enhance prevention and early intervention employment and educational supports for youth in poverty in 2024-25. \$410K for a one-time increase in funding for school supplies to support approximately 8,200 school-aged dependents of income assistance. Other investments in prevention and early intervention are detailed throughout this report.

OSD worked with government and community partners to support implementation of Solution Six of Nova Scotia's Action for Health to address barriers to better health and well-being. OSD participated on an Executive Advisory with the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD), and Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH) to develop the Nova Scotia School Lunch Program. In its first year, the program was delivered in 258 schools that included elementary grades (pre-primary included) and provided over 4.7 million lunches. Government invested \$34.2M to support school lunch and breakfast programs in 2024-25.

The Minister of Opportunities and Social Development appointed a committee in May 2024 to review the *Children and Family Services Act* (CFSA); a legislative requirement every four years. The [Review Committee's final report and recommendations](#) for amendments to the CFSA was published on March 1, 2025. The Department is reviewing the report to determine next steps with addressing the recommendations.

B. Child and Family Wellbeing Program (CFW)

The Department continued to work toward reducing the number of children in the Minister's care.

- 766 children were in care on March 31, 2025, down from 790 on March 31, 2024.
- 336 children were in Alternative Family Care on March 31, 2025, down from 408 on March 31, 2024. Alternative Family Care helps prevent children from coming into care by providing financial assistance to extended family members to support a child's needs.
- Through various initiatives, such as revising the policy on temporary emergency arrangements (TEA), enhancing processes for consistent information gathering, and signing Service Level

Agreements with TEA providers, the number of children in temporary emergency arrangements reduced by 48.8% from March 31, 2024 to March 31, 2025. These efforts ensure that children in care are receiving the appropriate supports for their needs.

Continuing to support young adults transitioning from care remained a priority for OSD.

- \$1.7M was invested in 2024-25 for Post Care and Custody Agreements, which provide support to youth leaving permanent care to pursue their post-secondary education. As of March 31, 2025, there were 107 youth being supported through these agreements.
- The Path program provided financial aid to youth leaving care and a connection to community-based supports for six years. In 2024-25, the Path program budget was increased by \$2.16M to a total of \$4.6M. As of March 31, 2025, 266 young people were enrolled in Path, compared to 122 as of March 31, 2024. The Department has entered into an agreement with Family Service of Nova Scotia to deliver check-ins for Path program participants, helping to identify and respond to the evolving needs of young people receiving Path supports. This includes referrals to OSD-funded Youth Outreach or Youth Outreach Plus programs.

The Department continues its redesign of the foster care system, with continued collaboration with former children in care and foster caregivers on the new model. Regular engagements were held with the Foster Caregiver Reference Group and the Youth Reference Group, which include representatives from the Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia and care experience youth, respectively. During foster family appreciation week in October 2024, the Annual Years of Service payment in the amount of \$50 was provided to current foster caregivers to acknowledge their support to children.

The Department has a long-term goal of having 1,000 foster caregivers across the province. There were 806 caregivers (including respite caregivers) as of March 31, 2025, up from 725 caregivers the previous year. As of May 1, 2024, all approved foster caregivers have transitioned to the Mockingbird Family model, a new approach to foster care where, within a constellation of foster homes in proximity to one another, an experienced foster caregiver provides peer support and respite to nearby foster homes. In 2024-25, there was a total of 51 constellations across the province. The Department has also continued to expand foster care placement types by increasing the number of specialized and medical homes to 191 as of March 31, 2025. Caregivers within these homes possess specific skills, knowledge, or medical training to better support children with higher daily care needs.

The Department continued to invest in community-based service providers delivering prevention and early intervention programs to children, youth and families. Over 60 community-based service providers delivered 200 Child and Family Wellbeing prevention and early intervention programs and services in communities across Nova Scotia. In 2024-25, OSD provided an additional \$1.4M for five new Youth Outreach and three new Youth Outreach Plus sites and staffing, bringing the total number of Youth Outreach Programs to 72. Youth-at-risk who have complex needs are supported through these programs via safe community spaces for drop-in and outreach, individualized supports and mentoring, accompaniment and navigation, community connections and referrals, and provision of basic needs like food, transportation, and clothing.

OSD continued its implementation of an evaluation framework for funded prevention and early intervention programming, with progress in developing and piloting outcome measurement tools for collecting participation and outcome data. This outcome data will help ensure this programming is effective in meeting the needs of children and their families.

Implementation of the new Practice Framework for supporting children, youth and families is ongoing. The Framework is rooted in reflective practice and was developed with a focus on Africentric and Indigenous approaches, with the child and family at the centre of every decision and a commitment to reunification where possible. The Framework reflects input and feedback received from approximately 500 individuals and organizations, including all levels of OSD and Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services and many community partners such as the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers and the Association of Black Social Workers. Work began in spring 2023 on the creation of a simplified public-facing policy manual to enable the practice changes envisioned in the Child and Family Wellbeing Practice Framework. This manual was completed in 2024-25 and made public on July 21, 2025, the effective date of the new manual.

In 2024-25, CFW's Africentric team consulted on over 250 CFW files across the province to ensure supports being provided to children and families were culturally responsive and rooted in community, in alignment with the Africentric approach emphasized in the Practice Framework.

C. Disability Support Program (DSP)

In 2024-25, the Department focused on reducing the number of people in institutional settings and increasing the number of individuals living in community under the Human Rights Remedy. The Remedy is a legally binding requirement defining the actions the Province must take to address the findings of the Human Rights Board of Inquiry that the Province systemically discriminated against persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia by not providing access to supportive housing in community.

A key focus of the Remedy work is to close institutional settings to move DSP participants to the community of their choice. On January 1, 2025, admissions to adult residential centres, regional rehabilitation centres, and residential care facilities were prohibited. The number of people in institutional settings decreased by 10.6% from 2023-24 to 2024-25. DSP supported 4,685 people living in community; a 7.6% increase from 2023-24 to 2024-25. The service request list for DSP services and programs continued to decrease. 1,340 people were on the waitlist as of March 31, 2025, a 12.3% decrease from March 31, 2024. There was also a 50% reduction in the number of individuals on the service request list not receiving any support from DSP (a decrease of 293 exceeding the Remedy the target of 289).

To provide individuals with control over their life choices within community, OSD continued developing new individualized supports with the aim of eventually transitioning all DSP participants to individualized funding. This has involved work to identify a long-term partner to provide administrative support for those using individualized funding. The Department also developed new policies to guide individualized funding, which have been shared publicly and with service providers to help them adapt to the new funding model and meet the requirements of the Remedy.

OSD also worked to improve existing individualized funding programs while the new funding model is launched. The Independent Living Support program (ILS), which provides individualized funding for hours of support services to help eligible DSP participants to live on their own, supported 1,038 participants in 2024-25. This was a 33.2% increase from 2023-24. Independent Living Support Plus (ILS+) was introduced in May 2024 to provide support up to a maximum of 84 hours a week (versus 31 hours in ILS), including options for overnight support.

Additionally, the Department launched the School Leavers Program, providing community-based transition planning for students with disabilities leaving high school and entering adulthood. Students

are connected to Local Area Coordinators, who work with them, their caregivers, their school-based support team, and the community to support their transition plan.

Enhancing human and technical resources has been critical to implementing the Remedy:

- 97 disability support professionals were recruited to positions in four new regional hubs.
- The Department has completed the engagement and design process and is initiating an implementation plan for Disability Support Outreach Teams, formerly known as regional multi-disciplinary teams. These teams of allied health professionals will provide community-based supports to persons with disabilities with an early focus on those leaving institutions and transitioning to life in their community of choice.
- To better address emergency situations as they arise, a Crisis Prevention and Community Response strategy has been established with the goal of preventing crises and responding when they do happen in a way that does not utilize institutional settings.
- A [dedicated website](#) was launched to provide easier access to information about the Nova Scotia Human Rights Remedy.

In recognition of the impacts of the Remedy on disability support service providers, the Department launched the Service Evolution Fund in October 2024 to support providers in transitioning to a business model that provides community-based support and aligns with the Remedy. The Province invested almost \$1M between October 2024 and March 2025 to advance 24 transformation projects in communities across the province to empower independence, choice, and self-determination for individuals with disabilities in Nova Scotia.

OSD remained committed to ensuring disability supports were culturally relevant, building upon learnings from Africentric engagements and connections with other equity seeking communities. In March 2025, the second Rebuilding Hope conference was hosted in four locations and online to share updates on the Remedy to service providers, DSP participants, and their families/caregivers, and to gather input from the community to help shape the direction of disability support services. Over 1,200 Nova Scotians participated in the conference.

As the Department continues to respond to the Remedy, external perspectives and advice on disability supports are critical. In 2024-25, more than 60 Nova Scotians were appointed to regional advisory councils to provide advice on community supports. At least half of the council members have lived experience with a disability and will work with government and disability support partners to transform the disability support system, ensuring accessibility, and inclusivity at the local level.

D. Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA)

In 2024-25, the Department continued work to modernize policies and programming to ensure ESIA is equitable, anti-racist, and client focused. This included work on a new case management approach to enable a more preventative and holistic response to the needs of ESIA clients. The Department also continued to monitor progress and implement recommendations from an Africentric review of the ESIA program and policies to address identified gaps and barriers impacting African Nova Scotians. This work has been guided by an Africentric Advisory Committee and information was shared with community in 2024-25 in New Glasgow, Yarmouth, Sydney, Truro, and Preston Townships.

Initiatives were implemented in 2024-25 to help income assistance recipients with the cost of living:

- The Disability Supplement was introduced in May 2024, providing additional financial support to 15,253 income assistance recipients with a disability or serious medical condition, but not

eligible for the Disability Support Program. A one-time \$150 payment was provided to ESIA recipients not eligible for the supplement.

- In July 2024, income assistance and other assistance streams were increased by 2.5%, retroactive to April 2024. Rates were then indexed in January 2025, with annual increases based on inflation going forward. Approximately 24,647 households (37,011 beneficiaries) received income assistance monthly in 2024-25.

OSD continued to prioritize food insecurity initiatives. In 2024-25, \$4M was funded to Feed Nova Scotia and SchoolsPlus to alleviate hardships from rising food costs, and \$2M to support Collaborative Food Networks in 10 communities across the province. Seven of these networks were operational in 2024-25, with the remaining three scheduled to launch in 2025-26. These networks address intersectional poverty and food security issues, while empowering the capacity of communities to meet their food needs.

Employment Support Services (ESS) continued to improve employability supports and enhance participation in employment and post-secondary educational opportunities. Enhancements to the earned income exemption threshold enabled working income assistance recipients to retain more of their employment income while still in receipt of income assistance supports as they stabilize to the workforce. The threshold was extended to boarder, roomer, and rental income, and education and job training allowances. The Department has worked to increase awareness and access to employment supports, improve support for ESS service providers to administer programs, and expand programming for youth. In 2024-25:

- The number of participants in ESS programming increased by 13.2%, 8,166 individuals, up from 7,211 the previous year.
- The percentage of the ESIA caseload participating in ESS increased to 27%, up from 25% in 2023-24.
- 1,150 participants exited the ESS program to employment, 22 post-secondary sponsored youth participants graduated, and 65 post-secondary sponsored ESIA recipients graduated. ESS program participants gained employment in several fields, including construction, retail, office administration and security.

To help reduce intergenerational poverty, ESS continued to invest \$6.1M in 2024-25 to enhance employment-focused youth prevention programming, including access to post-secondary education funding, community and mentorship connections, career planning. \$1.5M was invested to specifically expand the EDGE program, Career Rising, Skills2SucSEED and to enhance the Youth Development Initiative. 150 more youth have participated in EDGE, and an additional site was added for Career Rising program, allowed for additional project funding under the Youth Development Initiative, and supported the continued operation of Skills2SucSEED.

In partnership with community service providers, 3,799 youth participated in a range of employability programs. 2024-25 investments included \$850,000 to deliver culturally responsive Youth Development Initiative programming to 113 Indigenous youth and 2,200 African Nova Scotian youth.

Supportive Housing Approach

OSD is dedicated to creating 1,155 new supportive housing units by 2027-28, bringing the provincial total number of units to 1,586. On March 31, 2025, the total number of supportive housing units in operation was 1,033. This included 202 supportive housing units with culturally appropriate supports

to support Urban Indigenous, African Nova Scotian populations, individuals exiting corrections, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, and those with complex barriers.

In November 2024, Nova Scotia's first supportive housing tiny home community was opened in Lower Sackville; a collaborative partnership between the Province, Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), United Way Halifax, the Shaw Group, Dexter Construction, and Atlantic Community Shelters Society. Housing and wraparound supports were provided for up to 70 residents with a \$0.9M annual operating budget.

In response to the growing homelessness crisis, the Province invested \$9.9M to operate 200 transitional shelter units to establish shelter villages in the HRM, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, and Kentville. All units became operational in 2024-25 and provided safe and dignified transitional shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness.

The Department continued to support individuals experiencing homelessness through The Bridge, Nova Scotia's first integrated shelter-healthcare initiative, opened in 2023 at the former Dartmouth hotel, offering temporary all-gender shelter and wraparound support—including onsite primary and mental health care—across seven floors for up to 187 people. This collaborative project between OSD, DHW, Office of Addictions and Mental Health, Nova Scotia Health, Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, and community service providers supports individuals experiencing chronic homelessness to attain permanent housing through coordinated case planning. The site continues to operate with an annual budget of \$21.7M.

Status of Women Office

The Status of Women Office focuses on issues and priorities that affect women, girls, and female-identifying individuals. It advances its vision of gender equality by ensuring that women and their children are safe from gender-based violence; strengthening women's economic security; and encouraging women's participation in leadership. The Office also supports the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, which advises the Minister Responsible for the *Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act* about issues affecting the lives of Nova Scotian women and girls.

Status of Women Priority Areas in 2024-25:

A. Transition Houses and Women's Centres

The Status of Women Office continued to invest in Transition Houses and Women's Centres to support women experiencing gender-based violence. In 2024-25, funding to both providers increased, with a one-time investment of \$17.9M to cover costs over four years. This new funding is being used for additional staffing and increased wages and operational funding. In 2024-25, the province's 10 Transition Houses sheltered 2,154 individuals and their supportive services were accessed 7,456 times. 14,195 clients of the province's 10 Women's Centres accessed supportive services 19,348 times.

B. Women-centred Approaches to Safety & Preventing Gender-based Violence

In 2024-25, the Status of Women Office provided \$5.1M through the *Canada-Nova Scotia Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence* and \$2.5M through *Standing Together to Prevent Domestic Violence (Standing Together)* to increase service provider capacity to address and prevent gender-based

violence, expand culturally responsive services, and address factors exacerbating gender-based violence. Examples of programs and services in 2024-25 include:

- Wele'g - Living Well Program: Delivered at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, this program supported 193 youth, nearly doubling its number of participants in 2024-25. The youth program offers a weekly drop-in schedule, hygiene and snack pantries, transportation services, a youth space filled with craft supplies, and cooking classes.
- Getting Everyone Online (GEO) Nova Scotia: 227 cell phones with data plans provided to women in crisis across Nova Scotia.

Throughout January and February 2025, the Status of Women Office launched a campaign through radio, television, and social and digital channels to promote the 211 Men's, Women's and All Genders Helplines. In January, there was a 20% increase in calls (564 in December 2024; 691 in January 2025). February saw a 38% increase in ongoing sessions (54 in January 2025; 79 in February 2025), and a 13% increase in single sessions provided by the 211 helplines after the campaign started (564 in December 2024; 657 in February 2025).

The Status of Women Office has ensured its work aligns and responds to the recommendations of the Mass Casualty Commission (MCC) Final Report and the Desmond Fatality Inquiry (DFI) Report. Through programs funded by the *National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence* and *Standing Together*, the Office is working with community-based partners to advance work addressing 24 of the MCC recommendations and 5 of the DFI recommendations.

The Office continued to support Indigenous-led approaches in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. In September 2024, the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association (NSNWA) opened the Resiliency Centre in Millbrook, providing a safe space for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people to access culturally appropriate programs to support them in living happier, healthier lives.

The Office supports initiatives to prevent human trafficking and support survivors. The Nova Scotia Trafficking and Exploitation Services System (TESS) partners (such as Phoenix Youth Programs, NSNWA, Colchester Sexual Assault Centre and YWCA Halifax) increase community awareness and supports. TESS hosts an up-to-date website containing a directory of resources and access to training. The YWCA of Halifax's Safer Spaces Program supports young adult survivors of human trafficking with emergency transitional housing and wraparound supports. The NSNWA reports that they "have been able to provide more services to women, 2-sprited people and families who are at risk, increase the knowledge base around human trafficking and I believe we have opened the eyes of many people on the reality of Human trafficking in community and what is happening in plain sight." In 2024-25, they provided supports to 40 women in community and hosted a conference on raising awareness on human trafficking for 75 participants.

C. Economic Security & Leadership

The Status of Women Office has continued to focus on strengthening economic security for women through their participation in leadership opportunities. In 2024-25, the Office partnered with Equal Voice Canada to deliver a campaign school for women interested in exploring a career in politics. Online sessions with 61 participants and one in-person session with 24 participants were delivered. Four campaign school participants have since been elected to public office (three at the municipal level and one federally).

The Office continued funding the Women Innovating in Nova Scotia (WINS) Bursary, providing financial support to women studying within the science, technology, and skilled trades programs at the Nova Scotia Community College. 20 students received a \$2,500 WINS bursary in 2024-25, with individuals self-identifying being from under-served and under-represented communities.

The Office supports “Together We Rise: Black Women-Centred Actions” with the Delmore Buddy Daye Learning Institute. 123 people attended three events in 2024-25 highlighting Black and African Nova Scotian women's leadership in gender-based violence and politics. Participant feedback reflected the importance of culturally responsive leadership, intergenerational storytelling, and creating spaces where Black women's voices are centered, celebrated, and amplified.

Financial Results

Departmental Expenses Summary			
(\$ thousands)			
<u>Programs and Services</u>	<u>2024-2025 Estimate</u>	<u>2024-2025 Actuals</u>	<u>2024-2025 Variance</u>
Senior Management	1,138	1,228	90
Strategic Policy and Decision Support	4,642	4,549	(93)
Corporate Services Unit	3,225	3,396	171
Diversity, Equity & Engagement	638	487	(151)
Service Delivery	96,904	108,352	11,448
Strategic Operations and Innovation	18,775	19,251	476
Disability Support Program (DSP)	668,290	640,679	(27,611)
Child and Family Wellbeing (CFW)	168,953	173,862	4,909
Employment Support and Income Assistance Program (ESIA)	589,795	611,457	21,662
NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women	26,809	50,656	23,847
Total - Departmental Expenses	1,579,169	1,613,917	34,748
Additional Information:			
Fees and Other Charges	11	-	(11)
Ordinary Recoveries	21,256	23,124	1,868
Total: Revenue, Fees and Recoveries			
TCA Purchase Requirements	7,310	3,054	(4,256)
Funded Staff (# of FTEs)			
Department Funded Staff	1,724.0	1,617.3	(106.7)

Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation:

Department of Opportunities and Social Development expenses were \$34.7 million or 2.2 per cent higher than estimate primarily due to \$23.8 million for one-time Gender Based Violence supports, \$14.0 million related to staffing and other operating costs, \$11.9 million in grants to support homelessness and improve food security, \$9.4 million due to Income Assistance utilization and Nova Scotia Child Benefit, \$6.4 million decreased drug rebates from the Pharmacare Program, \$3.9 million for grants to provide digital access to low income Nova Scotians, and \$2.9 million for initiatives supporting Prevention and Early Intervention and Youth programming. These increases were partially offset by \$30.0 million mainly due to changes in timing of initiatives for the Human Rights Remedy, and \$7.6 million decreased utilization of employment support services grants.

Revenue, Fees and Recoveries Variance Explanation:

Opportunities and Social Development actuals were \$1.9 million higher than Estimate due to \$2.6 million increase for Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments Initiatives, and \$0.7 million increase in Children's Special Allowance entitlements. These are partially offset by reduction of \$1.5 million in CPP/EI benefits and assigned maintenance payments recovered on behalf of IA clients and Provincial recoveries of overpayments to IA and DSP clients.

TCA Purchase Requirements Variance Explanation:

Department of Opportunities and Social Development expenses were \$4.3 million lower than estimate primarily due to start delays to the DSP CCM Implementation and other milestones such as the ESIA and CFW modules.

Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation:

The Department of Opportunities and Social Development FTEs were 106.7 lower than Budget primarily due to hiring delays relating to the Human Rights Remedy implementation.

Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

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

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

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

The Act also protects employees who do disclose from reprisals, by enabling them to lay a complaint of reprisal with the Labor 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 Opportunities and Social Development:

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2024-25
The number of disclosures received	0
The number of findings of wrongdoing	0
Details of each wrongdoing	n/a
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing	n/a