

FCSS Agenda

September 5, 2023 at 3:30 p.m.

Town Office Council Chambers 502 -2nd Avenue



VISION

Bassano FCSS is a strong partner in a healthy community.

Mission

Bassano FCSS works to build a strong community through locally driven proactive partnerships and preventative programming.

1. Call to Order

2. Attendance and Regrets

3. Adoption of Agenda for September 5, 2023

4. Adoption of Minutes

4.1 June 19, 2023

5. Financial Summary

5.1 Period ending August 31, 2023

6. Director's Report

6.1 Period ending August 31, 2023

7. CAO Report

None

8. Unfinished Business

8.1 FCSS Advisory Board – Meals on Wheels Policy P-FCSS012 – Proposed

8.2 2024 Mental Health First Aid Course Program Delivery

9. New Business

9.1 October Programming – Open Discussion

9.2 Safe 4 Life – Community Self Defense Training

10. Correspondence

10.1 Understanding and Responding to the Challenges Faced by FCSS Programs in Rural Alberta

10.2 Community Drug Alert Info Package

11. Adjournment

Next Meeting Date: October 2, 2023 at 3:30 p.m.

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR BASSANO FCSS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING HELD ON June 19, 2023

ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

- Tammie Hauck
- Christine Petkau
- Kevin Jones
- Alice Slomp
- Evelyn Jensen
- Sandra Mitchell
- Heather Basarab
- Kacia Reid

ADMINISTRATION

- Amanda Davis, CAO
- Amanda Barron, FCSS Director

1. CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR HAUCK called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

2. ATTENDANCE AND REGRETS

- Alice Slomp
- Evelyn Jensen

3. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

FCSS49/2023 Moved by **MEMBER BASARAB** that the June 19, 2023 agenda is approved as presented.

CARRIED

4. MINUTES OF MAY 1, 2023

FCSS50/2023 Moved by **MEMBER MITCHELL** to approve the minutes of the May 1, 2023 FCSS Advisory Board meeting as presented.

CARRIED

5. FINANCIAL SUMMARY

FCSS51/2023 Moved by **MEMBER REID** to approve the financial summary for the period ending May 31, 2023 as presented.

CARRIED

6. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

6.1 Director's Report – May 31, 2023

FCSS52/2023 Moved by **MEMBER PETKAU** that the FCSS Directors report for the period ending May 31, 2023 is approved as presented and discussed.

7. CAO REPORT

A verbal CAO report was provided.

8. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

9. NEW BUSINESS

9.1 2023 Summer Programming

FCSS53/2023 Moved by **MEMBER MITCHELL** that the FCSS Advisory Board hosts a "Lifesaver Sundae" social during Drowning Prevention Week, July 17-21, 2023 at the Bassano Outdoor Pool.

CARRIED

FCSS54/2023 Moved by **MEMBER BASARAB** that the FCSS Advisory Board hosts a Social Skills Mini Series to provide skill development for children and youth as proposed through the Jory John Bundle. The FCSS Director shall design the program where possible to align with summer programs offered in Bassano such as swimming lessons.

CARRIED

FCSS55/2023 Moved by **MEMBER REID** that the FCSS Advisory Board provides 40 Summer Craft and Activity Packages containing gross and fine motor skill developing activities for children to be distributed on pick up basis as proposed.

CARRIED

FCSS56/2023 Moved by **MEMBER PETKAU** that the FCSS Advisory Board provides a Summer Activity Calendar geared toward whole body wellness including the promotion of local attractions for people to pick up at the town office. The calendar will contain opportunities to snap a picture in action to win a small prize and will be a continuation of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health programming through FCSS.

CARRIED

9.2 Mental Health First Aid Training -Program Opportunity

FCSS57/2023 Moved by **CHAIR HAUCK** that the FCSS Director prepares a formal proposal to offer Mental Health First Aid training for the September meeting to include costs and minimum registration requirements. This can be introduced to the public in advance to gauge interest prior to the September meeting.

Member Reid departed at 5:02.

9.3 2023 September Programs

FCSS58/2023 Moved by **MEMBER BASARAB** that the FCSS Advisory Board invites members of the town to participate in suicide prevention and awareness through a lunch time walk at a date selected by the director. Further to build 50 Intention Journals to be given out throughout the month of September.

CARRIED

FCSS59/2023 Moved by **CHAIR HAUCK** that the FCSS Advisory Board offers to partners with the Bassano School to seek Rilee Manybears as a speaker in honor of National Truth and Reconciliation Day, and where possible to offer the Blanket Ceremony to be hosted at Bassano School, open to the public.

CARRIED

Member Mitchell departed at 5:12.

10. CORRESPONDENCE

None

11. MEETING ADJOURNED

FCSS60/2023 Moved by **CHAIR HAUCK** to for adjournment of the regular meeting at 5:16 p.m.

CARRIED

Chair Signature

Director Signature



TOWN OF BASSANO
(51) 2023 FCSS Departmental Budget
YTD
August 31, 2023

Page 1 of 1
2023-Aug-31
1:01:51PM

General Ledger	Description	2023 Budget	2023 Actual	2023 Budget Remaining \$
Revenue				
1-51-00-410-00	FCSS - 2023 WOMEN'S WELLNESS	(5,000.00)	(5,231.00)	231.00
1-51-00-590-00	FCSS - OTHER REVENUE	(2,500.00)	(95.00)	(2,405.00)
1-51-00-595-00	FCSS - COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS DONATIONS	(5,000.00)	(319.40)	(4,680.60)
1-51-00-840-00	FCSS - CONDITIONAL GRANT	(39,505.00)	(1,160.00)	(38,345.00)
1-51-00-850-00	FCSS - GRASSLANDS FCSS /TOWN CONTRIB.	(35,230.00)	(35,429.00)	199.00
1-51-00-710-00	TSF FROM FCSS RESERVE	(12,620.00)	(968.35)	(11,651.65)
* TOTAL Revenue		(99,855.00)	(43,202.75)	(56,652.25)
Expenditure				
2-51-00-110-00	FCSS - SALARIES	58,000.00	32,369.96	25,630.04
2-51-00-130-00	FCSS - EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTIONS	4,050.00	2,508.23	1,541.77
2-51-00-135-00	FCSS - AUMA BENEFITS	6,555.00	4,500.55	2,054.45
2-51-00-137-00	FCSS RRSP CONTRIBUTION	1,200.00	800.00	400.00
2-51-00-150-00	FCSS - ADM TRAINING & EDUCATION	2,500.00	(250.00)	2,750.00
2-51-00-200-00	FCSS PROGRAMS	10,000.00	3,504.44	6,495.56
2-51-00-200-01	FCSS PROGRAM - 2023 WOMEN'S WELLNESS	6,500.00	5,524.45	975.55
2-51-00-211-00	FCSS -TRAVEL/LODGE/PHONE & BOARD DEVEL.	1,750.00	852.96	897.04
2-51-00-220-00	FCSS - ADVERTISING & MEMBERSHIPS	500.00	553.24	(53.24)
2-51-00-510-00	FCSS - GENERAL GOODS & SUPPLIES	3,800.00	3,799.00	1.00
2-51-00-595-00	FCSS - COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS	5,000.00	0.00	5,000.00
* TOTAL Expenditure		99,855.00	54,162.83	45,692.17

*** End of Report ***

FCSS Director's Report

Period Ending: August 31, 2023

Prepared By: Amanda Barron, Director

Supporting Community Members



SUPPORTS

Seniors Benefits

Throughout June, July and August we supported 16 seniors with benefit enrollment/submissions and acquiring resources to services.

Referrals/ Supports

We supported one client in attaining housing and attending a skill building class for gainful employment through Champion House and the Brooks YMCA.

I delivered a beef package that was donated to a family in Bassano from a kind resident.

PROGRAMS

Rural Pop Up

June's Rural Pop-Up experienced disappointment as there were no attendees, our local bylaw officer was also present to read to the children that day. The Director will begin to place personal invites to locals to regain participation in the program.

July had zero attendance despite personal invites, sandwich board and additional Facebook invitations. Upon speaking with SPEC we agreed to cancel the August Rural Pop up and resume in September. They reported having experienced low participation in other communities through the summer months.

I will update all our advertising to include the program description of Parent and Tots people may not have a clear idea of what the Rural Pop Up program entails.

A Car Seat Clinic is scheduled to attend the Rural Pop Up on October 17th, this service will help parents ensure car seat safety.

Canadian Volunteer Income Tax Program

No new remittances to report.

Small Town Smokedown – Mocktails Booth & First Nations Health Consortium

Bassano FCSS worked in collaboration with Southeastern Fetal Alcohol Network to bring Mocktails to our annual community event the Small-Town Smoke Down. Support materials and prevention themes surrounding Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Drinking and Driving and other teen related issues were available to the public as well as an alcohol-free option to those attending the event. Over 300 Mocktails were distributed.

In collaboration with the First Nations Health Consortium, FCSS was able to offer an introduction to programs available for our indigenous population. Support materials and swag were available for people attending the event, enrollment was available on site.

FCSS Director's Report

Period Ending: August 31, 2023

Prepared By: Amanda Barron, Director

Supporting Community Members



50+ Activity Crawl

This program was designed to include local recreational outlets and provide instruction/immersion to promote ageing well in your community. This event included Disc Golf, Bowling, Pickle Ball, Yard Games and a social hour afterward. Participants could choose to engage in the events of their choosing. We experienced low numbers of attendees with a program total of 7, upon debriefing we would like to attempt again hosting on a weekend to try and attract those who may still be in the workforce.

Supporting Seniors Session

This session was to educate about fraud protection and types of fraudulent activities that seniors are targeted for, presentations by Connect First Credit Union and Bassano RCMP. It also included Goals of Care & Personal Directives Planning by Linda Parrish, Physician Assistant. FCSS prepared an introduction to Seniors Benefits, the plans and how to get enrolled as well as providing information to resources to allow seniors to remain in their homes longer. We had 12 community members attend; all were appreciative of the information. We had limited subscribership for this program and that may be in part to overprogramming as a local senior's center had also planned an education session that morning.

In programming Senior's week for future years it would be prudent to develop collaborations with other user groups to avoid overlapping programs, and ensure we are addressing all social needs. One possible solution is to develop a collaborative framework in which local social programmers would meet collectively to discuss key issues and share prospective programs and timelines.

Bike Safety Rodeo

In collaboration with Brooks Safe Communities, Bylaw, RCMP members and Bassano School, grades 1-4 engaged in the Bike Safety Rodeo. Each group had an hour-long session featuring age-appropriate education on safety procedures and purpose followed by putting the skills into practice on a bike course designed to test their knowledge. We provided Freezies to the children after completion. We had a total of 65 children at the program.

Craft & Activity Packages

On July 3rd we released our craft and activity packages designed to target fine and gross motor skills as well as emotional regulation to the public with an overwhelming response. We distributed 25 packages the first day and had 2 left by July 15th prompting the making of an additional 40 packages. This summer 80 packages were distributed to local children to enjoy.

Lifesaver Sundae

In collaboration with Knox Presbyterian Church and the Bassano Outdoor Pool we were able to participate in Lifesaver Sundae. Swimming was sponsored by the church and to promote drowning

FCSS Director's Report

Period Ending: August 31, 2023

Prepared By: Amanda Barron, Director



Supporting Community Members

prevention. Pool staff engaged families with relays and other games utilizing lifesaving skills and knowledge. We also served participants a free sundae to wrap up the festivities. We served over 75 sundaes to participants.

Summer Social Skills Club

Social Skills Club was piloted this summer hosting weeklong sessions featuring stories by Jory John that provoke children to examine cause/effect and their emotions to increase self-regulation skills. Additionally, aiding children in literacy, friendship and conversation skills that aid in daily living. We hosted a session in July and August each having 6 registered participants and receiving positive feedback from parents. Many of which said their children couldn't wait to come each day. Survey data was also collected for outcomes reporting.

Healthy Active Summer Calendars

We created 50 summer active calendars that were distributed to local businesses for community members to access themselves. Included were daily activities that promoted whole body wellness, to nourish body, mind, and spirit. The calendar also included opportunities for engagement and chances to win a prize. We did not have any community members take advantage of the opportunities to win a prize. An option moving forward would be to combine the Active August activities with the Active Summer Calendar so that social and physical engagement opportunities are scheduled weekly through the summer months for residents to attend, providing access for singles to join into group activities.

Parade of Garage Sales

Bassano's Parade of Garage Sales has seen substantial growth this year. With 26 registered sales and another half dozen pop ups bringing the town total to over 30. Bassano FCSS provided a refreshment stand, distributed maps and our last 20 craft bags to parade attendees. I had the opportunity to welcome visitors and have many engaging conversations. It was great to see the Knox Presbyterian Church provide a Poor Man's Lunch and the Memorial Library hosting a Story walk in the Campground as well as an author visit. There were many shoppers from surrounding communities taking in this event.

We distributed 70 printed maps for this event, in coming years the map will be made available online as we had many requests.

Prevention, Intention Journals

As part of our continued commitment to mental and physical wellbeing, for Suicide Prevention Day we created a resource to turn people's attention inward and focus on the self. Prevention, Intention Journals were created for men, women and children specifically designed to engage and provoke thought as well as provide stress relief. They also included resources for individuals to access locally. In total 100 journals were created and distributed at Bassano Pharmacy, Town Office, Long Term

FCSS Director's Report

Period Ending: August 31, 2023

Prepared By: Amanda Barron, Director



Supporting Community Members

Care and Bassano Playfair Lodge. The initial printing of 60 journals moved very quickly promoting us to print a further 40 journals.

August Activities

Expanding on our 50+ Activity Crawl Bassano FCSS offered Disc Golf, Tennis and Bowling to encourage physical activity and social connectivity. Through the month of August we held open activity opportunities for residents to enjoy unstructured activity, all equipment was provided and there was no charge to attend. An activity was offered weekly for 2 hours,

INITIATIVES

Welcome Wagon

Through June, July and August Bassano FCSS distributed 4 packages. From January through June of 2023, we have welcomed 15 new residents to town. We purchased 50 branded reusable bags in July to hold contents and I have begun updating packages.

233-3rd Ave	2-Jun-23
401- 8 Ave	26-06-2023
413 4th Ave	27-06-23
518 7th Ave	30-06-23

GENERAL UPDATES

Partnerships/Collaborations

Bassano FCSS has put focus this year on building and maintaining strong local partnerships to provide our community with accessible programming while utilizing our resources effectively. Bassano has a rich social service sector, by fostering collaborations we can provide programming for all demographics locally. Some of our recent collaborations have included Bassano Outdoor Pool, Knox Presbyterian Church, Bassano School and local emergency services. Through the development of collaborative relationships programs can reach a larger, broader audience. For example, hosting the Bike Rodeo collaboratively at Bassano School saw our attendees grow from 3 to 65.

Bassano Pro Rodeo Support

We supported the Bassano Rodeo Committee by helping procure volunteers to aid in parking duties and to help put up event signage. It is my understanding that this was very helpful and assisting in this way in 2024 will be welcomed.

Provincial Funding Agreement Amendment

In early March a 5-million-dollar increase was announced to support FCSS operations provincially. Bassano FCSS received a 4% increase over the 3-year funding term totaling \$4,888.00 to be distributed as follows.

FCSS Director's Report

Period Ending: August 31, 2023

Prepared By: Amanda Barron, Director



Supporting Community Members

- 2023 -\$1,333
- 2024 - \$1,777
- 2025 - \$1,777

2024 Budget

I have been working on the development of the 2024 preliminary budget, and program planning, this will allow us to pursue grant funding for specific programs we hope to make available in Bassano.

Alberta Healthy Aging Conference - October 10-12

I have registered to virtually attend the Alberta Healthy Aging Conference this October 10-12. The conference will cover a wide variety of topics including the road to better transportation, building social resilience through literacy and asset-based community development. I am hoping to gain knowledge and insight on planning, developing, and delivering sustainable programs and services that will prioritize healthy aging in our community.

ARPA Conference October 26-28

I will be attending the Alberta Parks and Recreation Conference with Sydney Smith from October 26-28. I am looking forward to expanding my knowledge as this year's theme is "Inspiring Creativity and Community." This conference will focus on trends in recreation programming, parks and open spaces, environmental stewardship, and cultural and artistic programs, to create unique partnerships and collaborate with our community members. With our two departments working collaboratively on community programming learning at this conference will help us improve program development moving forward.

One Year Anniversary

It has been a wonderful year of growth for me as the Director of Bassano FCSS. I have embraced learning about our community needs and providing social programming locally. It has been an absolute pleasure working with such inspiring individuals and I thank the Advisory Board along with the Town of Bassano staff for having embraced me and supported my development. In the coming years I look forward to expanding our current programs and continuing to build community capacity in Bassano.

2023 FCSSAA Annual Conference November 22-24

The FCSSAA Annual Conference is being held in Edmonton Alberta again this year. I have secured lodging in preparation. We have not been notified what the conference fee is yet or the content that will be offered. Once these have been determined, we can determine if attending will provide opportunity for growth. Members of the board can attend this conference as well providing budgetary allowance.

DIRECTOR TRAINING

FCSS Director's Report

Period Ending: August 31, 2023

Prepared By: Amanda Barron, Director



Supporting Community Members

In July, I took Basic Emergency Management to better prepare in event of emergent situations such as environmental and or physical events. This is required as part of our Emergency Social Services, I will be doing an online ICS 200 course in September as part of this onboarding as well.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

- National Day of Truth and Reconciliation
- Sing Out on Fire Safety – Fire Prevention Week
- Trunk or Treat
- Fall Clean Up

Attachments

1. Action Items

Town of Bassano
FCSS Advisory Board Action Items List 2023

March 13, 2023 Regular Board Meeting		
Barron, A	Send invitations to Bassano School and Gem school to attend performance	
Barron, A	Collaborate with Bassano Fire Department to participate in performance.	Confirm early Sept.
Barron, A	Contact Stuart Luchies with opportunity for County Fire Departments to provide program in other communities.	email sent 04/11/23
Barron, A	Draft advertising for public distribution for "Sing out on Fire Safety" performance.	
April 3, 2023 Regular Board Meeting		
Barron, A	Add YOB Open Discussion to Agenda April 2024	
June 19, 2023 Regular Board Meeting		
Barron, A	Rotate Minutes	Completed June 22/23
Barron, A	Update Resolution Index	Completed June 22/23
Barron, A	Add meals on Wheels Policy to September agenda	Completed July 6/23
Barron, A	Develop Program for Lifesaver Sundae in collaboration with Bassano Pool	Completed July 23/23
Barron, A	Prepare and distribute advertising for Lifesaver Sundae	Completed July 4/23
Barron, A	Prepare program for Summer Social Skills using Jory Johns book series, to align with other summer programs being offered.	Completed July 11/23
Barron, A	Order Jory John book sets and prepare resources for learning	Completed July 4/23
Barron, A	Prepare advertising and distribute for Social Skills Series	Completed June 26/23
Barron, A	Prepare registration for Social Skills session	Completed June 21/23
Barron, A	Create 40 Craft/Activity Packages for pick up throughout summer	Completed June 29/23
Barron, A	Create Summer whole body wellness calendars for distribution at local businesses	Completed June 26/23
Barron, A	Prepare formal proposal to offer Mental Health First Aid training including, cost, minimum registration and roles and responsibilities of each party	Completed July 10/23
Barron, A	Prepare program and advertising for lunch hour Suicide prevention walk, and distribute	Completed July 26/23
Barron, A	Create 50 Intention Journals for distribution through out Bassano via local businesses	Completed July 25/23
Barron, A	Distribute Journals for pick up by residents	Completed Aug 15/23
Barron, A	Collaborate with Bassano School to seek Rilee Manybears as speaker for National Truth and Reconciliation Day, to be open to the public.	
Barron, A	Collaborate with Kim Wolfleg on acquiring the blanket ceremony to occur on National Truth and Reconciliation Day at Bassano School	Completed July 8/23

SUBJECT: FCSS Advisory Board – Meals on Wheels Policy – P-FCSS012- Proposed

BACKGROUND

FCSS has supported the Meals on Wheels Program in Bassano for several years through collaborations with the Newell Housing Foundation. It was motioned at our May 1, 2023 meeting to draft a Meals on Wheels Policy.

FCSS43/2023 Moved by **MEMBER SLOMP** that FCSS acts as the administrative body for the Meals on Wheels program. A policy shall be prepared to outline roles and responsibilities for the board's review at the June 2023 meeting. **CARRIED**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the continued successful delivery of Meals on Wheels by setting clear roles and responsibilities of each collaborator and define the program application and payment process.

OPTIONS:

☒ #1 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board approves the Meals on Wheels Policy P-FCSS012 as presented.

☐ #2 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board approves the Meals on Wheels Policy P-FCSS012 as amended (define amendments).

☐ #3 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board rejects the Meals on Wheels Policy P-FCSS012.

DIRECTOR COMMENTS

1. The proposed policy was provided to the Newell Housing Foundation and the Playfair Lodge for feedback. All parties are satisfied with the draft policy.
2. It is noted in the policy that the FCSS Department will bridge the gap for unpaid accounts. Recipients have 45-days to pay their invoice, if unpaid, there will be an automatic suspension from the program. Is this acceptable to the board?

ALIGNMENT WITH OPERATIONAL POLICIES

☒ FCSS Programming Policy P-FCSS007

PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

☒ #1 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board approves the Meals on Wheels Policy P-FCSS012 as presented.

Prepared by: Amanda Barron, FCSS Director

Reviewed by: Amanda Davis, CAO

Attachments:

1. Meals on Wheels Policy P-FCSS012- Proposed
2. P- FCSS007 – Programming Policy

Policy Title	Family and Community Services Advisory Board – Meals on Wheels Policy
Authority	FCSS Advisory Board
Approved (Dates/Motion #)	
Policy Number	P-FCSS012
Review	Annual at AGM
Reviewed by	Advisory Board on September 11, 2023

Policy Statement

The FCSS Advisory Board is responsible to develop, maintain, and provide preventative based social programs and support services in Bassano pursuant to the Family and Community Support Services Act, the Family and Community Support Services Regulation, and the Town's strategic plan.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this policy is to clearly establish roles and responsibilities for the delivery of the Meals on Wheels Program offered in Bassano.

Definitions

Director – means the FCSS Director, an employee of the Town, that is dedicated to the FCSS Advisory Board managing social programs and services.

FCSS Advisory Board – a volunteer advisory board of directors appointed by Council with the responsibility of leading and managing social programming in the Town.

Town – means the incorporated municipality of Bassano.

Playfair Lodge – means the representative of the Newell Housing Foundation providing the services for the Program.

Recipient – means the person who is receiving the program.

Program – means the preparation and delivery of hot meals to approved recipients in Town; Meals on Wheels.

Program Administration – means intake of applications, communicating program recipients needs and performance of annual reporting to maintain the Program.

Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Director to ensure this policy is implemented.

Process

1. The Program will align with the [FCSS program Handbook](#) and must follow FCSS reporting guidelines based on the [FCSS Measures Bank](#).
2. The Program will align with P-FCSS007 Programming Policy.
3. The Program is not subsidized by the Town or the FCSS Department.
4. The Director shall ensure Program Administration is maintained, and facilitated annually with a clearly defined program outline, objective, and measurement matrix.
5. The Director shall provide Playfair Lodge with recipient enrollments, delivery destination, meal frequency, and contact information for Program facilitation.
6. Playfair Lodge shall prepare meals in an approved facility for the Program.
7. Playfair Lodge shall provide and coordinate transportation of meals.
8. Playfair Lodge shall invoice the Town on a monthly basis for the Program.
9. The Town will pay Playfair Lodge directly for the Program, and invoice Program recipients accordingly.
10. Defaulted meal payments will be maintained through the FCSS budget.
11. The policy shall be reviewed annually by the FCSS Advisory Board to ensure its purpose and validity.

Eligibility Requirements

1. Reside in the Town's corporate limits.
2. Complete and submit an enrolment application (Appendix A).
3. Recipients must maintain a good standing of their account. Any recipient that defaults on their account or has a balance outstanding after 45-days will be immediately suspended from the Program until the account balance is paid in full.

Roles and Responsibilities

Director
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support the Program by effectively communicating needs between Recipient and Playfair Lodge. 2. Complete accounting services and maintain accurate records. 3. Complete an annual Program review with Playfair Lodge
Playfair Lodge
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set the rate for Program meals annually and report rates to the Town. 2. Maintain financial responsibility of production and distribution of Program meals. 3. Invoice the Town for Program delivery on a monthly basis for the meals distributed.
Applicant
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete the enrolment application and submit to the Director. 2. Maintain account balance. Unpaid accounts will result in suspension from the Program. 3. Communicate changes to scheduled delivery 48 hours in advance to Playfair Lodge.

Policy Reference

1. P-FCSS007 Programming Policy

END OF POLICY

DRAFT

Appendix A

Meals on Wheels Application for Enrolment

Date: _____

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Bill to: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Town/Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Next of Kin: _____ Phone Number: _____

Starting Date: _____

End Date: _____

Delivery Schedule:

☐ Monday ☐ Tuesday ☐ Wednesday ☐ Thursday ☐ Friday

Signature of Client: _____

Meals on Wheels is an unsubsidized pay per use program operating on a monthly billing cycle.
Unless otherwise specified Bassano FCSS will confirm continued enrollment on an annual basis.

If you would like to preauthorize your monthly payments, please complete the credit card information below.

Credit Card Information				
Card Type:	<input type="checkbox"/> MasterCard	<input type="checkbox"/> VISA	<input type="checkbox"/> Discover	<input type="checkbox"/> AMEX
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____			
Cardholder Name (as shown on card): _____				
Card Number: _____				
Expiration Date (mm/yy): _____				
Cardholder Postal Code (from credit card billing address): _____				

I, _____, authorize _____ to charge my credit card above for agreed upon purchases. I understand that my information will be saved to file for future transactions on my account.

Any recipient that defaults on their account or has a balance outstanding after 45-days will be immediately suspended from the Program until the account balance is paid in full.

Consent Initial _____

Customer Signature

Date

This information is being collected for the purpose of Meals on Wheels Services pursuant to the provisions of the Municipal Government Act and its regulations and pursuant to Section 32 (c) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Policy Title	Family and Community Services Advisory Board – FCSS Programming Policy
Authority	FCSS Advisory Board
Approved (Dates/Motion #)	October 4, 2022 (M# FCSS064/2022)
Policy Number	P-FCSS007
Review	To be reviewed annually by September 30
Reviewed by	Advisory Board – October 4, 2022

Policy Statement

Locally, FCSS is funded to provide programs and services that are tailored for the unique needs of the community of Bassano. The FCSS Advisory Board plays a key role in identifying community-based needs and implementing programming to support such needs within the community.

Definitions

Director – means the FCSS Director, an employee of the Town, that is dedicated to the FCSS Advisory Board managing social programming.

FCSS Advisory Board – a volunteer advisory board of directors appointed by Council with the responsibility of leading and managing social programming in the Town.

Members – volunteers appointed to the FCSS Advisory Board.

Town – means the incorporated municipality of Bassano.

Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the FCSS Advisory Board and the Director to ensure this policy is implemented.

Process

1. The FCSS Advisory Board will ensure they follow all applicable Federal, Provincial, and Town legislation, acts, regulation, bylaws, policies, and procedures when creating programming for the community.
2. The FCSS Advisory Board will identify local needs within the community that fall within the mandate of FCSS, and the Regulation to promote the advancement of Bassano and its people. Needs identified by board members should be presented formally to the FCSS Advisory Board. If there is a majority vote to investigate the need, a motion shall be passed by the board members for the Director to prepare a proposal for further consideration by the FCSS Advisory Board while ensuring other projects and time commitments can be managed.
3. The FCSS Advisory Board shall stay within budget, decide what programs and activities will take place or be funded. The FCSS Director will be responsible for ensuring the FCSS Advisory Board is informed of funds available to the board when programming options are presented.

4. The FCSS Advisory Board has the power to develop, evaluate, maintain, or cancel programs that are no longer suited for the community. The FCSS Advisory Board may provide public relations for FCSS programming within the community. The FCSS Advisory Board will promote, encourage, and facilitate volunteerism in the community, and to encourage citizen participation in program development. The Director will facilitate co-operation and joint planning with related community groups, agencies, committees, or surrounding communities to better co-ordinate support service programs and facility planning.
5. When evaluating the continuation, termination or renewal of programs, the FCSS Advisory Board shall follow the Program Logic Model (Appendix A).

Communications and Marketing

All FCSS programs will be advertised to the community through various mediums to ensure we are able to reach a broad audience.

1. Advertising timelines will be set on a program-by-program basis as established by the FCSS Advisory Board.
2. All program posters will be distributed to the FCSS Advisory Board via email prior to their distribution as notification.
3. The Director will release communications for all programs in the following ways
 - Posters will be placed at businesses within the community including:
 - AG Foods
 - Creaky Floor
 - Credit Union
 - Bassano Pharmacy
 - Post Office
 - Subway
 - Empty Bottle
 - Harry's Place
 - Library
 - Town Office
 - Thrive
 - Community Hall
 - Western Financial
 - Esso
 - Liquor Store
 - Facebook
 - Town Website
 - Town Newsletter, when timing is applicable.

4. FCSS Board members will be responsible for ensuring they share information about FCSS programs within the community and promote participation in the programs and events. The Director will provide programming information to Town administration to assist with communication between all departments.

Policy Reference

1. P-FCSS006 Financial Planning Policy
2. P-FCSS008 Funding Application Policy

END OF POLICY

Approved

Appendix 'A'

Program Logic Model

Program/Project Title:	
Statement of Need: <i>What</i> community issue, need or situation are you responding to?	
Overall Goal: <i>What</i> change or impact do you want to achieve?	
Broad Strategy: <i>How</i> will you address the issue, need or situation?	
Who is served? Target Group	
FCSS Overarching Goal: How does it contribute?	
Inputs : resources invested to achieve your goal, e.g., staff, volunteers, money, materials, equipment, technology, partners, information including legislation	
Outputs: - <i>Activities and processes used</i> , e.g., advertising, workshops	

2024 Mental Health First Aid Course – Program Delivery

BACKGROUND

Throughout 2023 Bassano FCSS has put an emphasis on Mental Health. We have provided resources, support and spaces for conversation. To further our community's growth offering Mental Health First Aid Courses would provide education, prevention, and mental health supports resources to help build a strong community.

At our June 19, 2023 meeting it was motioned that the Director prepares a formal proposal offering Mental Health First Aid to the Advisory Board for consideration.

FCSS57/2023 Moved by **CHAIR HAUCK** that the FCSS Director prepares a formal proposal to offer Mental Health First Aid training for the September meeting to include costs and minimum registration requirements. This can be introduced to the public in advance to gauge interest prior to the September meeting.

CARRIED

The Proposal

To increase community capacity in understanding Mental Health and provide awareness of common mental health issues, Bassano FCSS will facilitate Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training as provided by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) to the community. Two courses would be offered, MHFA Standard and First Responders Leadership.

MHFA Standard Face to Face – One day

Course Type	MHFA Standard
Description	During the course, participants will learn how to recognize signs that a person may be experiencing a decline in their mental well-being, and how to provide support to that person. First Aid interventions for Overdose, Suicidal Behavior, Panic Attacks, Psychotic episode, and Acute stress reaction.

Delivery Style	Module 1- Self led online Modules 2 &3 Face to face 1 day
Cost per participant	\$240
Cost per participant subsidized	\$120

Course Type	MHFA First Responder Leadership
Description	Covering the same topics as MHFA Standard, with an added half-day for leadership with content relevant to the manager/employee relationship and other workplace considerations like the duty to accommodate, return-to-work strategies, etc.
Delivery Style	Face to face - 8 hours
Cost per participant	FREE - <i>grant funded</i>

Program Budget

Bassano FCSS submitted a grant to TC Energy Build Strong to fund the MHFA training program. FCSS was awarded \$3,500 with direction that funding is earmarked specifically toward the course fees for First Responders, allowing us to provide training with no registration fee for First Responder Leadership.

It is within our budget for FCSS to cover 50% of the facilitator costs for the MHFA Standard to encourage greater involvement in Mental Health training. This would make the program affordable and accessible to a broader audience with min/max registration because facilitator fees are set at a flat rate.

- Minimum registration 15
- Maximum registration 25

FCSS's contribution to offer MHFA would be \$1,800.

The courses would be offered in 2024.

OPTIONS:

☒ #1 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board offers Mental Health First Aid Courses, Standard and First Responder Leadership in 2024. FCSS will fund 50 percent of the MHFA Standard course to a maximum of \$1,800.

☐ #2 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board offers Mental Health First Aid Course to be hosted in the first quarter of 2024 without providing subsidy.

☐ #3 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board declines offering Mental Health First Aid Course currently.

DIRECTOR COMMENTS:

Various actions were taken to support this program over the summer.

1. Issued an online public survey to gauge interest – we had 19 responses, 18 of which indicated MHFA training would be beneficial. The average cost affordability was between \$50-\$150 to allow attendance.
2. Letters were hand delivered to local businesses to explain the program offering and its value – the feedback received was limited with 2 expressions of sending employees to receive training if offered in early 2024.

ALIGNMENT WITH OPERATIONAL POLICIES

☒ - P-FCSS006 – Financial Planning Policy (program fits within budget)

☒ - P-FCSS007 – Programming Policy (program logic model, establish advertising timelines)

PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

☒ #1 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board offers Mental Health First Aid Courses, Standard and First Responder Leadership in 2024. FCSS will fund 50 percent of the MHFA Standard course to a maximum of \$1,800.

Prepared by: Amanda Barron, FCSS Director

Reviewed by: Amanda Davis, CAO

Attachments: None

October 2023 Programming

BACKGROUND

In October there are many nationally recognized days, in the past few years FCSS has focused on Mental Health Day, National Older Persons Day, and Halloween. Last year our Older Persons Day Dance experienced a low participant volume. Trunk or Treat continues to have huge success.

Let's continue to offer great programs to the community in October.

PROGRAMMING IDEAS

A Sweet Thank You

October is a month of thankfulness, October 9th being Thanksgiving Day, however this is not the only nationally recognized day in October.

October 4th – Cinnamon Roll Day
October 5th – World Teacher Day, National Poetry Day
October 9th – World Postal Worker Day
October 10th – World Mental Health Day
October 21st – Police Commemoration Day

By combining all these special days, we can give a heartfelt thanks to each of the professions through sharing a deliciously sweet snacks, and a handwritten poetic thank you to recognize the impacts they have in our community, and the appreciation our community has for their service, making their hearts smile. Our teachers help shape the minds of youth; Canada Post has been connecting people since 1851 and the RCMP have proudly protected Canadians since 1920.

To provide this program board participation is optional for the delivery date, with a budget allowance of \$200.00.

Dr. Jody Carrington Workshops

Dr. Jody Carrington offers an interactive online workshop touching on topics that may be of interest to our community members.

Dr. Carrington is a renowned psychologist sought after for her expertise, energy, and approach to helping people solve their most complex human-centered challenges. Jody focuses much of her work around reconnection – the key to healthy relationships and productive teams. Her approach is authentic, honest, and often hilarious. She speaks passionately about resilience, mental health,

leadership, burnout, grief and trauma – and how reconnection is the answer to so many of the root problems we face.



FCSS could provide a one Dr. Carrington session to the community about social media.

October 3rd – Social Media - Social media is abundant in our world today, and like it or hate it, it's something parents will need to navigate with kids and teenagers. The tricky part is social media is still somewhat new and we don't know the exact ramifications of these platforms on our kids' mental wellness. In this workshop, we talk about everything from setting boundaries and teaching our kids to online bullying and safety. This is a 60-minute conversation on the subject area followed by a 30-minute Q&A period, and downloadable resources.

A budget of \$ 300 would be allocated. We could facilitate this in a café style setting to encourage after-session discussions. Hosting would not require board volunteers.

Trunk or Treat

Trunk or Treat has been a way of ensuring community members could safely participate in Halloween festivities, hosted at the Homecoming Campground from 5-8pm. It also serves as an opportunity for those living on farms or those that are uncomfortable with having people at their homes to participate.

This is a wildly successful program. Let's run it again this year. The event could include:

1. Fire
2. Smores and hot chocolate
3. Candy bags
4. Other ideas?

To provide this program, Bassano FCSS requires volunteer time before the event to plan and decorate. During the event volunteers will help with smore making and hot chocolate. We need 2 volunteers' pre-event for 1-hour and a minimum of 2 volunteer' during event for 3+ hours, with a budget allowance of \$250.00.

If the board is favorable, Trunk or Treat program could be added to the Reoccurring Programs Policy P-FCSS011 during the next review.

CLARIFICATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

1. Does the board feel the proposed programming aligns with our community needs?
2. What would your ideal amount of volunteer time look like in the facilitation of these programs?

This open discussion is intended to provide guidance and direction. The outcome of the discussion will result in program development.

Prepared by: Amanda Barron, FCSS Director

Reviewed by: Amanda Davis, CAO

Safe 4 Life - Community Self Defense Training

BACKGROUND

To the best of my knowledge Bassano has not held publicly offered self-defense training. With personal crimes happening everyday throughout the world how can we build capacities of prevention and mitigation in our community? It is simple, we support personal development through self-defense training. We consulted Safe 4 Life, a professionally developed taught program offered throughout parts of southern Alberta to establish a training series.

Did you know, personal crimes can happen to anyone regardless of age, gender, and social-economic status. By providing an opportunity for community members to be engaged in “experiential learning” we can help educate individuals in the development of a safety plan for protecting oneself, and the knowledge and ability to recognize and avoid potentially dangerous situations. This type of training helps participants learn how to react to a dangerous encounter, knowing with confidence that they are able to implement their safety plans.

Who is Safe 4 Life?

Safe4Life is a self-defense and personal safety training company. They offer empowerment and confidence building classes and programs for people of all ages.

- The team consists of retired Policing Professionals, Social Workers, Early Childhood Educators, Emergency Medical Technicians.
- Provided programs to communities such as Sundre, Nanton and High River.
- Training is not Martial Arts based.
- The program focuses on the social and emotional strategies required to be aware and alert to risks.
- Instruct on basic and easy to recall hands on physical skills in the event of a situation that has turned harmful; however, their focus is always on awareness and avoidance.
- Supply all equipment.
- Community classes have up to 25 participants.

THE PROPOSAL

To engage our community in the development of personal safety planning, situational awareness, and physical skills to protect oneself from personal crimes and or dangerous situations, Bassano FCSS will host Safe 4 Life – Community Self Defense Classes. Occurring over one day classes will be offered in the following categories,

Program	<u>SafeKids – 6-10 yrs</u>
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABCD's of personal safety • Safety Cheer • Utilizing intuition • Confidence and awareness • Physical skills/hands on practice
Course Time	2 hours
Cost per participant	\$57.50
Cost per participant - Subsidized	\$30

Program	<u>SafeTwins – 11-15 yrs</u>
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizing intuition • Setting Boundaries • How to avoid dangerous/risky interactions • Developing a safety plan • Hands on self-defense strategies • Padded Attacker
Course Time	2 hour
Cost per participant	\$60.00
Cost per participant - Subsidized	\$30

Program	<u>SafeAdults/ SafeTeens – 16+</u>
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizing intuition • Setting Boundaries • How to avoid dangerous/risky interactions • 4 Keys to Escape • 4 Keys to Safety • Hands on self-defense strategies • Padded Attacker
Course Time	3-4 hours
Cost per participant	\$75
Cost per participant - Subsidized	\$40

BUDGET

It is within our budget for FCSS to cover 50% of the facilitator costs to encourage greater involvement in Safe 4 Life – Self Defense training. This would increase program affordability and accessible to a broader audience.

Facilitation fees are set as a daily rate thus, we would need to set a minimum number of registrants to ensure facilitation and align with our budget.

Minimum registration per session 10
Maximum registration per session 20

FCSS's maximum contribution to offer Safe 4 Life would be \$2850.00.

The program would be offered this fall.

OPTIONS:

☒ #1 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board offers the Safe 4 Life Community Self Defense program in 2023. FCSS will fund 50 percent of program costs to a maximum of \$2850.

☐ #2 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board offers Safe 4 Life Community Self Defense in 2023 at full cost recovery.

☐ #3 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board declines offering Safe 4 Life Community Self Defense.

DIRECTORS COMMENTS

1. I am applying for a grant, if we are successful, contributions will decrease.
2. Proposed program delivery late October early November 2023, before the start of the hockey season.
3. Programs can be advertised in other communities to help meet registration capacity.

ALIGNMENT WITH OPERATIONAL POLICIES

☒ - P-FCSS006 – Financial Planning Policy (program fits within budget)

☒ - P-FCSS007 – Programming Policy (program logic model, establish advertising timelines)

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

☒ #1 – That the Family and Community Services Advisory Board offers the Safe 4 Life Community Self Defense program in 2023. FCSS will fund 50 percent of program costs to a maximum of \$2850.

Prepared by: Amanda Barron, FCSS Director

Reviewed by: Amanda Davis, CAO



A Report Prepared for the Rural Municipalities of Alberta by the Alberta
Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities at the University of Alberta

Understanding and Responding to the Challenges Faced by FCSS Programs in Rural Alberta

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* ABOUT THE ALBERTA CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC), located at the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta in Camrose, has, since its founding in 2009, assisted rural communities in meeting diverse challenges across many areas of public policy through fostering constructive dialogue, promoting interdisciplinary and collaborative research, and developing partnerships. The ACSRC's mission is to link the research, outreach, and educational capacity of the University of Alberta with students, researchers, rural communities, rural community organizations, and policy makers at multiple levels across the province, nationally, and internationally in order to support the improved sustainability of rural communities and populations.

Thinking respectfully and reciprocally with, not just for, rural communities is a main objective of the ACSRC. Through dialogue and collaboration, the ACSRC operates an outreach program that provides direction and stimulates innovation in the development of rural communities. This is built around various collaborations with educational institutions, municipalities, and not-for-profit organizations on research projects that seek to create resilient rural communities across Alberta.

Recently, the ACSRC has been engaged in rural-focused projects related to substantiable economic development opportunities, community mental health, the delivery of social services, enhancing inclusivity, advancing the transition to renewable energy, aiding municipal collaboration, and better understanding both rural public opinion and rural-based populism. To read more about the ACSRC and the work it does, please visit: www.acsrc.ca.

* ABOUT THE RURAL MUNICIPALITIES OF ALBERTA (RMA) & THE PROJECT

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocates on behalf of Alberta's rural municipalities. The RMA's members consist of 63 municipal districts and counties, five specialized municipalities, and the Special Areas Board. The RMA's 69 members have several common traits: large land masses, small populations, and a lack of a traditional "population centre." RMA members provide municipal governance to approximately 85% of Alberta's land mass; Alberta is unique in Canada in that municipalities govern land throughout the entire province, from border to border.

Because Alberta's rural municipalities provide municipal governance to large, sparsely populated, and often isolated areas, efficient and high-quality delivery of municipal services is an ongoing challenge that often requires innovative solutions and partnerships with neighbouring towns and villages. It also means that provincial services readily available in urban areas are limited or inaccessible to rural residents, especially those without access to a personal vehicle.

For several years, the RMA has heard from members that reductions in provincial social service availability in rural communities combined with stagnation in provincial funding for municipally-operated family and community support services (FCSS) has led to unprecedented pressure on FCSS agencies to act as a catch-all for a range of social needs in rural communities, including many beyond their mandates. Similar pressure has been put on rural municipalities to contribute funding to FCSS services well beyond their formal requirement under the *Family and Community Support Services Act*.

As social challenges are often overlooked and under-reported in rural Alberta, the RMA prioritized the need to "dig deeper" on this issue to determine whether these concerns were as serious as members described, and whether they were widespread across the province. The work undertaken by the ACSRC provides some powerful evidence as to the reality of this issue in rural Alberta and will allow the RMA to continue to advocate for improved delivery of provincial social services and adequate funding of FCSS programs in rural communities.

* EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Family and community support service (FCSS) programs have provided vitally important “preventative” social service programming to vulnerable Albertans for several decades. FCSS programs remain a critical staple of community life in rural Alberta in particular, often existing as the “only place in town” for rural Albertans in need to seek assistance face-to-face. However, these rural-based programs are facing increasing pressures that are negatively impacting their capacity to serve those in need. This report highlights three key challenges faced by rural FCSS programs in Alberta and responds with four policy recommendations.

Key Challenges

1. Insufficient Provincial Funding

FCSS program costs have been rapidly increasing in the past five years, placing significant stress on their operations. Government of Alberta (GOA) funding (meant to equate to 80% of FCSS’s core funding) has remained largely stagnant since 2015. The majority of rural FCSS offices are increasingly reliant on municipal contributions well above their required twenty percent. However, rural municipalities do not have unlimited budgets, and are only able to make up so much of the shortfall created by the province refusing to meaningfully increase FCSS funding.

2. The Increasing Inaccessibility of Provincial Social Services in Rural Alberta

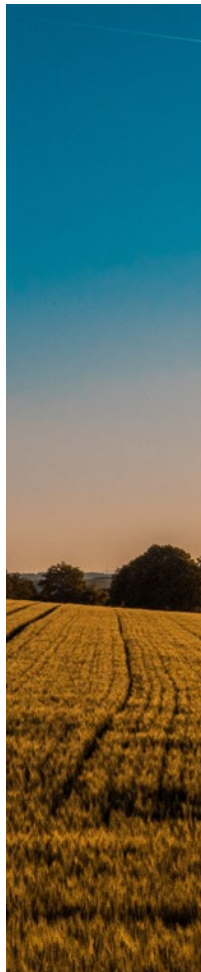
The ongoing centralization of social support services in Alberta has generated challenges for rural FCSS programs; challenges that have only multiplied with recent GOA decisions to transition to “1-800” intake lines and online web portals for several social service supports. As rural FCSS offices are often “the only shop in town,” they face a disproportionate burden compared to most of their urban counterparts, as more and more community members approach FCSS offices for help. This places additional pressure on rural FCSS offices to go beyond their mandate and provide intervention-type services, incurring the extra cost this entails with no hope of being reimbursed.

3. Changing and Increasing Social Needs in Rural Communities

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent period of inflation, FCSS programs across rural Alberta are encountering far more community members with more complex social needs than ever before. The number of people who are walking through the doors of rural FCSS offices in crisis has increased dramatically in the past few years, placing additional burdens on these offices to provide intervention-type services and incur the extra cost and effort this entails with no hope of being reimbursed.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Increase core funding from the Government of Alberta.
2. Increase the accessibility of provincial social support services for rural Albertans.
3. Ensure that future public policy related to social service delivery in Alberta is approached via a rural lens.
4. Ensure that social service policy in Alberta is designed with meaningful contributions from rural FCSS programs.



* SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Family and community support service (FCSS) programs provide effective and vitally important “preventative” social service programming to vulnerable community members of all ages throughout Alberta. In an era of ongoing centralization of social service supports in the province, FCSS programs remain a staple of rural community life, often existing as the only physical location where rural Albertans in need can seek assistance face-to-face. These offices are staffed with hardworking and caring individuals who go above and beyond in serving their communities.

However, these rural-based programs are facing increasing pressures related to stagnant provincial funding, the centralization of provincial social service supports, and enhanced social challenges faced by vulnerable community members in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent period of rapid inflation. These challenges are pushing many rural FCSS programs to the brink, negatively affecting some of the most vulnerable members of rural communities and placing pressure on rural municipalities to shoulder an ever-increasing share of the costs of FCSS programming — a share that is now routinely in excess of the 20% mandated by provincial legislation.

The Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC) at the University of Alberta was tasked by the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) to conduct a deep dive into the contemporary challenges faced by rural FCSS programs across Alberta and the subsequent burdens being placed on rural municipalities.

To complete this task, the research team utilized a mixed-method study design that was reviewed and approved by the research ethics board of the University of Alberta

(Pro00124133). The research began by conducting 20 semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews with individuals deemed knowledgeable about this topic. Those interviewed included 16 different directors of rural and smalltown FCSS programs across Alberta, one member of the Family and Community Support Service Association of Alberta (FCSSAA), and three separate Government of Alberta employees with significant experience working with rural FCSS programs. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, were conducted online using Zoom, and were transcribed for thematic analysis by the research team.

After completing all 20 interviews, the research team designed a 38-question survey to further explore the depth of the challenges faced by rural FCSS programs identified in the interviews. This survey was conducted online, was emailed to the directors of 158 FCSS programs scattered across rural and smalltown Alberta and received a total of 80 respondents. As Figure 1 and Figure 2, page 8 suggest, the survey respondents provided a representative sample of rural FCSS programs from across the province. Not only did the research team receive a good number of replies from each FCSS region, they also received responses from various sizes and structures of FCSS programs in Alberta.

Figure 1: What FCSS region is your program located in?

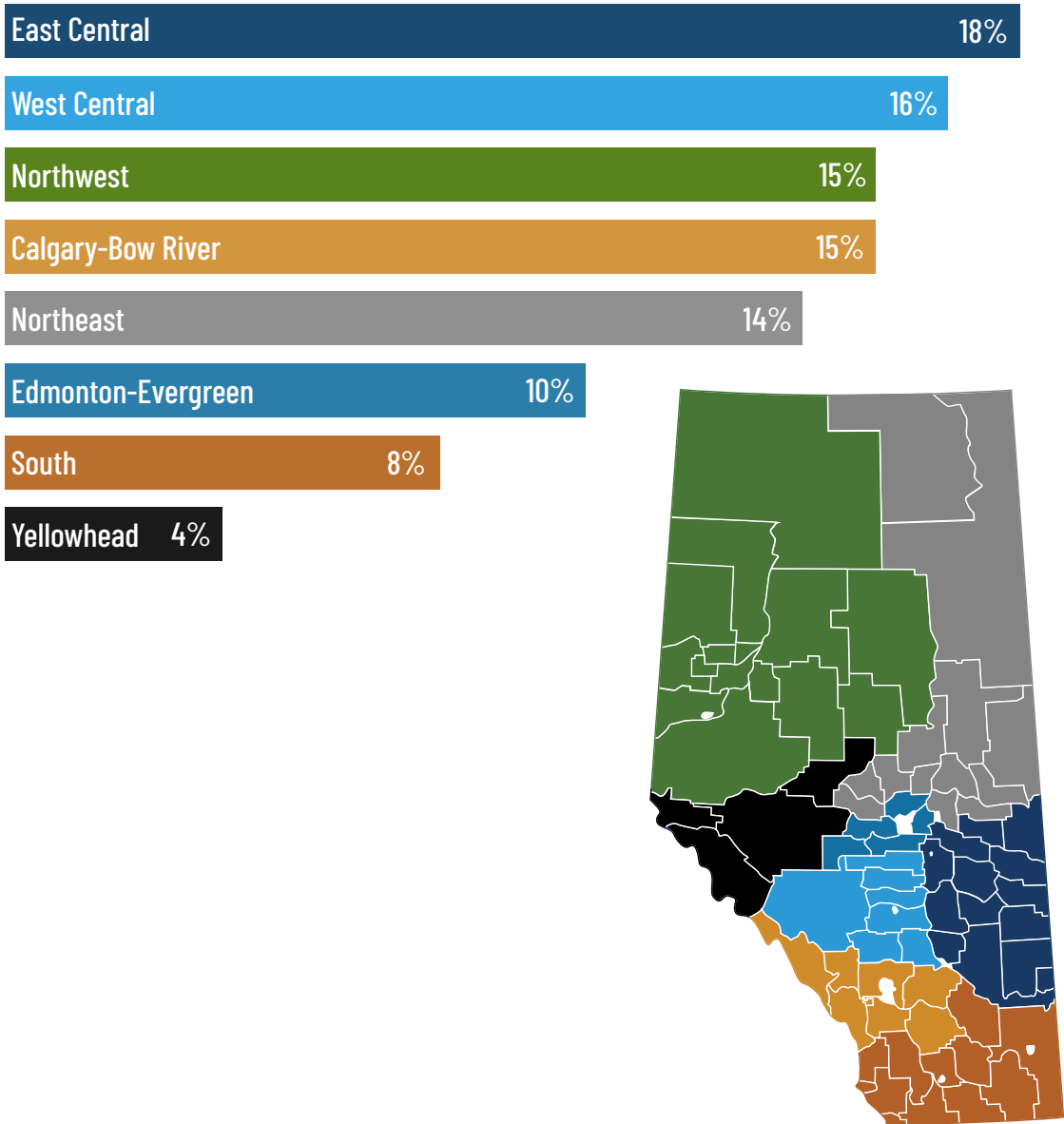
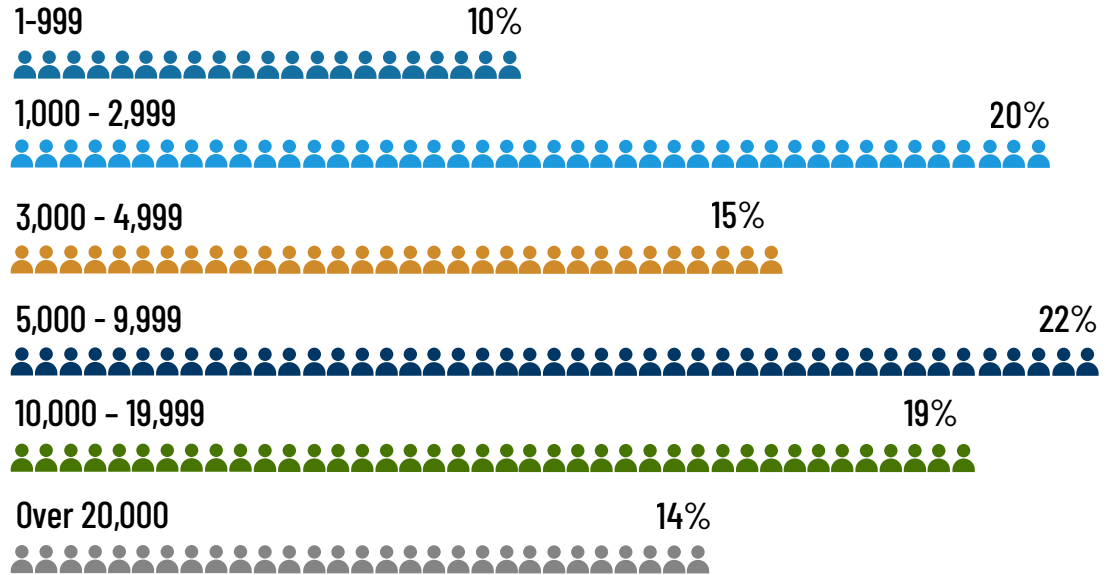


Figure 2: How large is the population your FCSS program serves?



The results of this study, discussed in detail throughout the report, were derived from an analysis of both the qualitative interview portion and the quantitative survey portion described above. In short, the research team found that rural FCSS offices are facing several important challenges that impact their capacity to address the social needs that are arising in their communities. After a brief description of the FCSS program in general (, page 9), the report delves into three specific and interlocking challenges and describe their implications for rural FCSS offices, rural Albertans in need, and rural municipalities in general (Section 3: Key Challenges, page 13). The report closes with four policy recommendations for the Government of Alberta (GOA) that would, if implemented, contribute to re-establishing the full capacities of rural FCSS offices, positively impact the lives of many of rural Alberta’s most vulnerable citizens who are currently being poorly served, and substantially relieve the additional FCSS-related fiscal load rural municipalities are being asked to shoulder in the current environment.



* SECTION 2: WHAT ARE FAMILY & COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES?

Social service delivery in Alberta is a complex file stretching across a variety of provincial ministries, agencies, and organizations. Family and community support services (FCSS) sit amid this complicated web, currently existing within the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services, but frequently collaborating with agencies from the ministries of Health, Education, Children's Services, and Mental Health and Addiction, among others.

With a history stretching back to 1966, there are now 210 local FCSS programs across Alberta providing services to 316 municipalities and Métis Settlements, most of which can be designated as "rural" or "small town."¹ All but a handful of FCSS programs are represented by the Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta (FCSSAA), a member-driven organization that brings FCSS directors and staff together for educational and networking opportunities, while also representing FCSS programs to various stakeholders,

¹ Technically, FCSS does not make any formal distinction between rural vs. urban, although there do exist strong perceptions among FCSS directors that "rural" FCSS programs, however defined, face distinct challenges from "urban" programs. Although it is possible to select a formal measure to define rural from urban, there is little reason to do so in this context given that there exist many FCSS programming partnerships across Alberta between low population / low density rural counties or villages and higher population cities (for example, the partnership between the City of Camrose and Camrose County under the umbrella of Camrose and District Social Services) that make drawing a divide between rural and urban especially complicated when it comes to FCSS.



especially the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Fundamentally, the mandate of FCSS programs is to provide preventive social services, defined as “a proactive process that strengthens the protective factors of individuals, families, and communities to promote well-being, reduce vulnerabilities, enhance quality of life, and empowers them to meet the challenges of life.” More specifically, FCSS programs are meant to enhance “protective factors to improve well-being and prevent problems before they occur or at an early stage before they require crisis supports.”²

FCSS programs are governed by the provincial *Family and Community Support Services Act*, although both their creation and the structure and programming decisions they make are strongly rooted in their local communities. When a municipality or Métis Settlement council decides to establish an FCSS program, they enter into an agreement with the Government of Alberta to jointly fund projects, services, or both. Since 1966, the funding model has been set at an 80/20 split, with the province meant to provide 80% of the core funding for FCSS programming and the municipality providing the remaining 20%.³ As of 2023, the total annual provincial funding for FCSS programs across Alberta is \$105 million. Importantly, the FCSS model also relies upon what was described to the research team as “the multiplier effect.” In essence, the funds contributed by the provincial and municipal governments are further buttressed by significant on-the-ground volunteer participation, especially from community organizations who partner with local FCSS offices on a variety of programming. This significantly extends the reach of FCSS programming. In 2021, FCSS programs across Alberta reported more than 47,850 volunteers contributing over 1,295,700 volunteer hours annually.

The Importance of Local Autonomy

Since 1981, local FCSS offices have had considerable autonomy to structure their programs and design their day-to-day programming in ways that are best suited to meet the local conditions in their respective communities. Indeed, “local responsibility for decision-making” remains a key principle of the entire FCSS program. Although the GOA is meant to provide the bulk of program funding, municipalities and Métis Settlements must “decide how to allocate the funding to best meet the needs and priorities of the community — within the FCSS

² “Family and Community Support Services Accountability Framework,” Government of Alberta, December 2022.

³ For a more detailed history of FCSS in Alberta, as well as more information of the variety of regulations FCSS programs must follow, see: “Understanding FCSS,” published by the *Family and Community Social Services Association of Alberta*. Available at: <https://fcssaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FCSS-101-All-Modules-2021.pdf>



mandate”.⁴ This concept was repeatedly highlighted as a strength of the FCSS model in our study, a conclusion that coincides with academic literature on rural community development, which frequently stresses the importance of local autonomy as a key ingredient in program success across issues⁵. Unsurprisingly, this autonomy has also ensured a good deal of variation across FCSS programs in Alberta — there is no standard FCSS model in the province.

At the municipal level, FCSS programs can be operated directly by single municipalities, as multi-municipal programs, or in partnerships. The single municipality structure is most common. In a multi-municipal program, two or more municipalities join as a “regional” or “district” FCSS program, and each participating municipality makes its 20% contribution to the program budget. In a partnering or “grant transfer” FCSS organization, neighbouring municipalities agree to give some or all of their FCSS funds to one of the municipalities to provide services to residents of the partnering municipalities.

In addition to these three possible program structures, FCSS also offers three different models of program administration: the FCSS department (or FCSS program), the community services department, or direct municipal management. An FCSS department has a designated FCSS program director and FCSS staff who are municipal employees and report to a manager or CAO. In a community services department arrangement, FCSS is part of a larger municipal department that provides other services like recreation. Under direct municipal management, the FCSS manager or CAO administers the FCSS program and reports directly to council, which has oversight over FCSS funding decisions. This model is more common in smaller communities with small FCSS budgets. The community services department model is common both in smaller communities and in larger cities, and the FCSS department model is popular in municipalities with medium-sized budgets.⁶ There are also six FCSS non-profit societies. In these programs, FCSS staff are employees of the non-profit society, not municipal employees. Although they are independent of the municipality, non-profit FCSS programs are still mandated to provide programming that meets community needs and priorities.⁷

Day-to-day programming also varies across FCSS programs; several interview respondents spoke passionately about the importance of tailoring programming to specific community needs. The most frequently mentioned programs across all FCSS offices included parent and family support, early childhood development, and youth programs. FCSS directors also described programs to benefit seniors, including home support and organized opportunities for social interaction to combat isolation, as key components of their mandate. Annual volunteer appreciation events, providing welcoming services for newcomers to the community, and low-income tax clinics are three other examples of commonly provided services in small and rural FCSS programs. Helping connect community members in need to the provincial and federal benefit and support services they are entitled to also falls within FCSS’s mandate.

Certain types of support services fall outside of the FCSS mandate and are thus ineligible to be supported with FCSS funding. These include services that are primarily recreational or leisure-oriented in nature; services that offer direct assistance such as money, food, or

⁴ See: “Understanding FCSS”

⁵ See: Yolande E. Chan, Jeffery A. Dixon, and Christine R. Dukelow, *Revitalizing Rural Economies*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013

⁶ “FCSS Program Structure, Administration and Delivery,” published by the Family and Community Social Services Association of Alberta, p.2. Available at: <https://fcssaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FCSS-101-All-Modules-2021.pdf>

⁷ “FCSS Program Structure, Administration and Deliver,” p.2

shelter; services which could be classified as intervention or rehabilitation; and services which duplicate programs that are the responsibility of a different ministry or government agency.⁸

The Reality of FCSS Programs in Rural and Small Town Alberta

The research team heard repeatedly throughout this study that the FCSS office is often the only social service agency in rural communities. As this report will demonstrate, this is an important consideration that plays a central role in the challenges FCSS programs face across rural Alberta.

Given that they are often “the only shop in town,” rural FCSS programs are likely to spend a large portion of their funding on direct service delivery, including salaries for employees who provide direct service delivery. In general, this contrasts with larger urban FCSS programs, which tend to grant their funds to the myriad other community service organizations that exist to offer programming in urban centres rather than deliver programming themselves.

Where there are other social service agencies and community-based non-profits, rural FCSS offices often play a coordinating role. In addition to managing their own FCSS funds and outside grants, FCSS programs will often act as the banker or guarantor for community non-profits, helping them to write grants, manage funds, and fulfill reporting requirements. Several of the rural FCSS directors interviewed described this as a community development role: they want to reduce barriers for the community non-profit sector and see FCSS as having an important role in making funding accessible to local non-profit organizations.

Finally, while all the FCSS directors interviewed expressed their support for prevention as the core of FCSS services, it is also clear that provincial stipulations around funding only preventative programming frequently conflict with daily realities in rural communities. Many directors emphasized that rural FCSS programs serve as social service “catch-alls.” In the words of one director, “In rural communities, if you need help and you’re not sure where to go, you go to FCSS.” Rural FCSS offices are regularly approached by community members seeking assistance that often goes beyond prevention and FCSS staff are thus frequently placed in the largely untenable situation of “staying true to their mandate” and turning people in need away or providing some type of required intervention support, an action that not only goes beyond their mandate but also requires additional effort and resources that are not reimbursed by the GOA. Unfortunately, a variety of factors have pushed FCSS offices, especially those in rural communities, in this direction, placing significant additional stress on these programs.



8 “Understanding FCSS,” p.4



* SECTION 3: KEY CHALLENGES

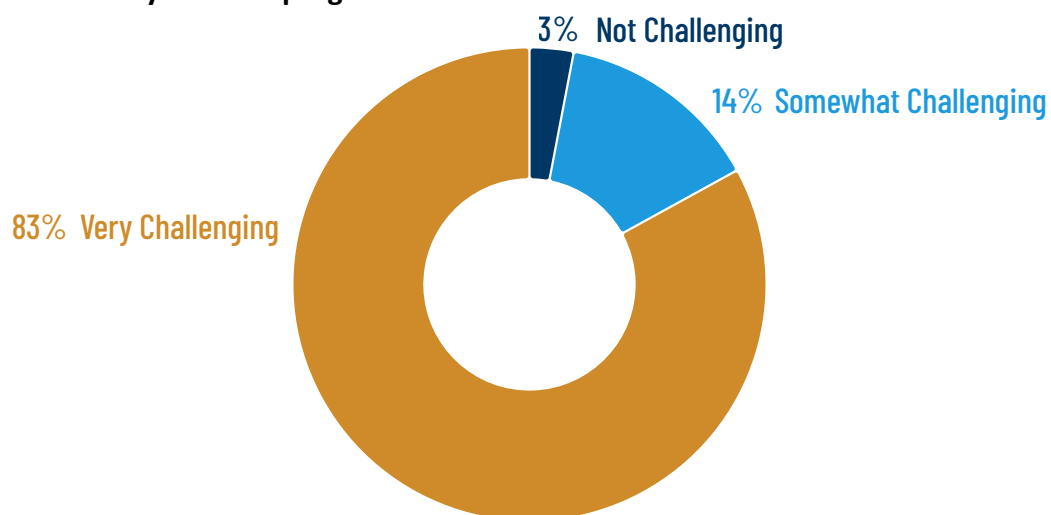
Over the course of this study the research team learned of a variety of challenges rural FCSS offices face, some specific to certain communities, others shared across the province. What follows is not a full account of all the challenges encountered, but rather a detailed consideration of three unique, complex, and often interlocking challenges that emerged as the most widespread and pressing for rural FCSS offices.

Key Challenge 1: Insufficient Provincial Funding

The most significant challenge rural FCSS programs deal with is insufficient core funding. As mentioned in the introduction, the core programming of FCSS is meant to be funded by an 80% contribution from the GOA, with the remaining 20% from the FCSS's municipality (or municipalities). However, the overall contribution to the entire provincial FCSS program has remained stagnant at \$100 million since 2015, with a small increase of \$5 million in 2023. Given the very real challenges posed by the ongoing centralization of other social services, increasing need in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the inflationary pressures of the past few years, FCSS directors across rural Alberta were unanimous in their concerns that the failure by the GOA to meaningfully increase funding is tantamount to a funding cut. Indeed, within a series of survey questions, FCSS directors were asked to rate how challenging certain issues were to their operations. On a survey question asking about stagnation of provincial funding increase since 2015, over 83% of respondents suggested that this has been “very challenging” (see Figure 3, page 14), the highest scores among all challenges listed in the survey.



Figure 3: How challenging has the lack of a funding increase since 2015 been to your FCSS program?^{9 10}



Although FCSS programs often supplement their core provincial and municipal funding with other government service contracts or grants, most rural FCSS offices increasingly rely on municipal contributions well over their required 20%. This municipal overcontribution often occurs because municipalities step in to fund programs which have become established in the community but have had provincial funding cut or are no longer affordable given rising costs of programming not being addressed with additional provincial funds. However, municipalities do not have unlimited budgets, and can make up only so much of the social service delivery shortfall created by the stagnation of provincial FCSS funding.

The survey results corroborated and expanded this information. Over 63% of survey respondents answered that their municipalities contribute more than the required 20% of FCSS funding (Figure 4, page 15). Almost 84% of survey respondents noticed an increase in the need for municipal overcontribution after 2018 (Figure 5, page 15). Of those respondents whose municipalities overcontribute, almost 43% estimated that the true contribution of their municipality is more than 35% of the FCSS program's budget (Figure 6, page 16).

⁹ For readability purposes, this data was collapsed from a survey question that employed a 10-point Likert Scale asking respondents to rate “how challenging” this was from 1 (not challenging) to 10 (extremely challenging). In this chart, scores from 1 – 3 were collapsed into “not challenging”, scores 4 – 6 were collapsed into “somewhat challenging”, and scores 7 – 10 were collapsed into “very challenging”.

¹⁰ This survey was completed in early 2023, before the increase in overall FCSS funding from \$100 million to \$105 million was announced by the GOA.

Figure 4: Does your municipality (or municipalities) contribute more to your core funding than the required 20%?

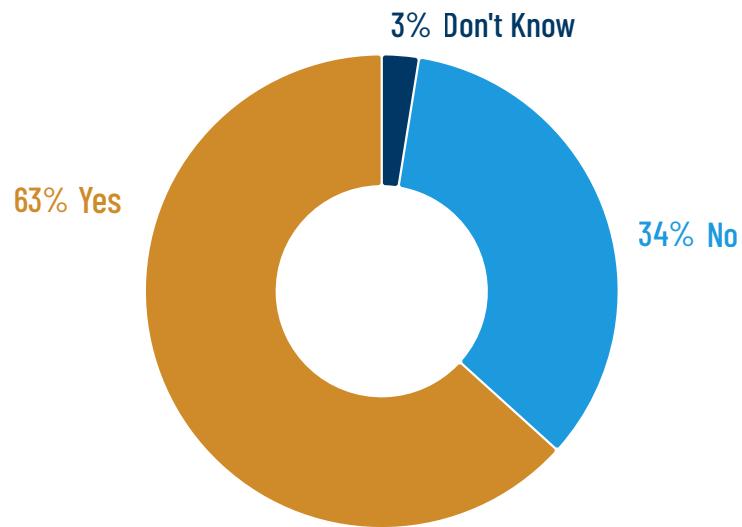


Figure 5: Has the need for this municipal over-contribution increased since 2018?

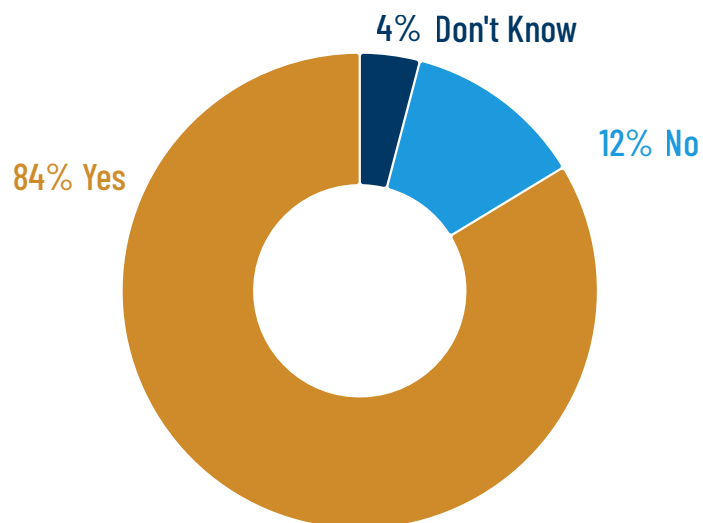
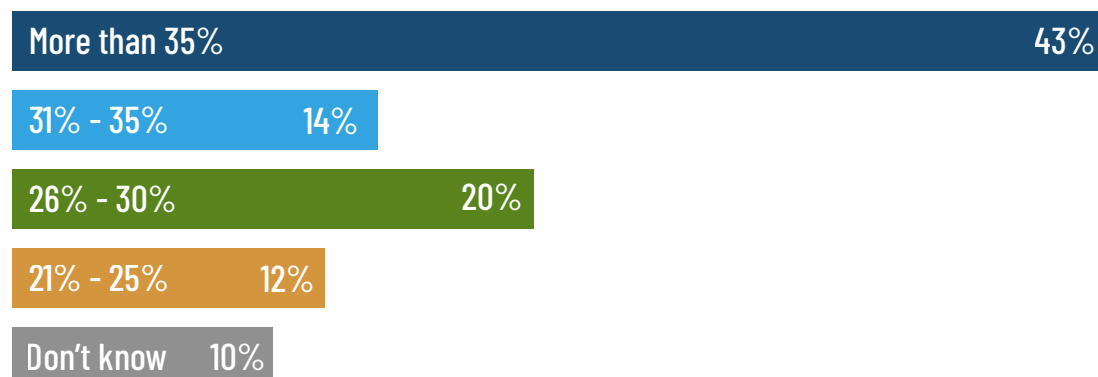


Figure 6: If your municipality is contributing beyond 20% of your core funding, can you provide an estimate as to the true percentage that your municipality is contributing?



Since “more than 35%” was the highest rate of overcontribution that survey respondents could choose, the survey did not capture the true rate of overcontribution in detail for municipalities with the highest rates of overcontribution. Indeed, within the interviews, the research team learned of one case wherein the municipality typically contributes about 50% of the FCSS program’s budget, but this year the contribution increased to 60%. Another director explained that their supporting municipalities will contribute more than the provincial amount this year.

Several FCSS programs are similarly growing more dependent upon outside grants for which FCSS directors must apply. Although outside grants (non-FCSS funding) make up a significant portion of some FCSS programs’ budgets, they make up very little or even none of other FCSS programs’ budgets. This is because accessing such funds depends on the capacity of individual FCSS programs. Directors and staff may or may not have the time or skillsets to identify, apply for, and manage external grants — a challenge that is especially acute for the smaller rural FCSS programs in Alberta.

Overall, the research team heard that insufficient funding is both a long-time concern and the result of recent events like the pandemic and some political decisions at the provincial level in 2019 – 2020 (to be discussed later). The funding challenges faced by rural FCSS programs can be broken down into four distinct components: insufficient operational funding, insufficient funding for staff, funding precarity / inattention to sustainability in funding, and, especially germane to this report, the funding challenges related to inattention to or lack of understanding of rurality on the part of the provincial government.



Insufficient Operational Funding

Overall, rural FCSS programs do not feel they have the funds to adequately meet community needs. More specifically, respondents noted that there is a lack of funding to meet the operating costs for direct delivery of ongoing programs. Adequate and reliable program funding is extremely important because community members and service users come to rely on programs to support their own and their families' wellbeing. When a longstanding program is cut because of insufficient funding, this results in a loss of trust in the community and a decrease in individual and social wellbeing. As one director noted, "If we weren't seeking additional funding and partnerships, we would be offering a lot less to our communities."

As will be discussed later in the report, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent inflationary period has resulted in several FCSS offices offering expanded or revised programming to meet emerging community needs, or simply being pulled in new directions to help those in need; this increased demand means higher staffing and material costs. Some FCSS directors interviewed seemed eager to respond to increasing and changing community needs by expanding their capacity to address a wider and more complex range of issues and taking on a larger social role in their communities. These directors noted, however, that they cannot expand their capacity without increased funding, infrastructure, training, and staffing.

It is also clear that the community-based non-profits many rural FCSS programs partner with have more financial need than the local FCSS program can meet. These groups have also been impacted by increasing community need and several rural FCSS programs are fielding increased requests for funding from these organizations, especially to fund mental health supports.

Rural FCSS directors also told us that their budgets are often too small to allow them to apply for many grants, largely because they lack the staffing capacity to do so. For similar reasons, many are unable to engage meaningfully

with evidence-based practice. Without the capacity to fund staff education, training, or research, rural FCSS programs perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding the impacts of their programming and designing more effective programs.

Ministerial-level changes to programming have also meant funding decreases for rural FCSS programs. In particular, the transition from Parent Link Centres to the Family Resource Network (FRN) model has seen FCSSs having to participate in a competitive process for a smaller pool of funding.

The Ending of Parent Link and the Introduction of Family Resources Networks

In 2019, the Ministry of Children’s Services announced, with essentially no consultation with the rural FCSS directors we spoke with, that funding for the Parent Link program was being cancelled. This popular program, frequently administered and delivered by FCSS offices in rural communities, provided free play groups, classes, education, and social opportunities for parents of children ages six and under, in addition to early learning opportunities and developmental screening for these children. In its place, the ministry launched a funding competition for organizations to participate in local Family Resource Networks (FRNs), a program with similar goals as Parent Link, although the program was now designed to offer supports for parents and children from 0 – 18, and the total amount of funding was now smaller.

In our interviews, this shift from Parent Link to FRNs was often a flashpoint for frustration for rural FCSS directors. Not only was the loss of Parent Link problematic for many parents of young children across rural communities who benefitted from the program offerings (especially those who relied on the access to the development screening available for very young children), FCSS directors lamented the increased competition between communities in search of a smaller pool of children-focused preventative funding made available under the FRN program. Other concerns shared included the difficulty inherent in delivering programs, with less overall funding, for children aged 0 – 18, the subsequent necessity to lay off staff in certain FCSS offices, and a broader sense that the new model’s reporting structures are “a chaotic mess” compared to those that existed under Parent Link.

The FRNs are recognized by many FCSS programs as a significant funding cut to child and youth support in rural communities, and many FCSS directors also noted other problems with the FRNs including organizational structure (discussed in more detail below). As a result of the transition to the FRN model, some communities have lost early childhood services completely, and that the loss of funding because of the reorganization of children’s services is hurting rural communities.

Finally, several directors highlighted that there is an overlooked rural component to FCSS

funding needs. Basing funding on population does not consider the needs of communities with high transient populations (like tourism-based economies). More generally, population does not give an accurate picture of need in rural communities because of the added costs rural communities experience because of large, sparsely populated areas, challenging geography, often poor internet and cell phone service, and transportation costs.

Overall, several of our respondents told us that their FCSS capacity is “maxed out” — current programs have full caseloads, FCSS offices are facing increasing need in their community and increasing costs overall, provincial funding did not increase between 2015 – 2022, and municipalities are being asked to shoulder more of the load.





Insufficient Funding for Staff

Insufficient staff funding presents several challenges for rural FCSS programs. Many rural FCSS programs have minimal staff (sometimes just one person) and many directors felt they could more effectively serve their communities if they had the funding to hire even one or two more staff. Limited funding also means that rural FCSS offices struggle to be competitive with salaries and benefits, which can make it difficult to attract and retain qualified staff. Several directors brought up the challenge of trying to maintain a balance between appropriate staffing levels — and adequate compensation for qualified staff — with program funding and grants to community-based organizations.

Putting more effort into seeking outside sources of funding (e.g., other provincial, federal, private, or charitable grants) is often not an adequate solution to funding shortfalls because applying for grants requires time and expertise that is already in short supply for minimally staffed rural FCSS programs. Outside grant funding can also come with stipulations about how the grant money is to be used (e.g., developing new programs) that pull FCSS staff away from delivering core and established programs. More than one director has had to turn down grant opportunities, or be very careful when applying for outside funding, because of a lack of capacity to administer grants. Many grants also do not include wages as an eligible use of funds.

The loss of Parent Link Centres and transition to the FRNs has also had an impact on staffing at some FCSS offices. Many directors admitted that losing their Parent Link Centre caused them to significantly restructure their FCSS program and resulted in a loss of hours and staff. Many FCSS programs that were successful in applying for FRN funding noted that the FRN funding is a significantly smaller amount of money than they had received with the Parent Link program.

Funding Precarity and the Lack of Sustainability in Funding

One of the significant stresses FCSS directors and staff experience is a sense of precarity over the future of FCSS. One respondent stated that “it seems to be this [feeling] ... always that FCSS is going to be gutted.” The people interviewed partially attribute this precarity and uncertainty to a sense of political instability in Alberta. The research team heard that there is a lack of clear signalling from the GOA that FCSS funding is secure. One director described waiting for FCSS’s next three-year agreement, which was overdue at the time of the interview, as a “nerve-wracking situation”.

Respondents also noted that formerly secure and reliable contracts are increasingly being put up for bid. One director said “We don’t know what’s going to happen” with a home care contract their FCSS has held for more than ten years. The team also heard that funding and support for FCSS programming or programs administered by FCSS is often piecemeal and short-term, with a lack of attention given to program sustainability in the face of unreliable funding.

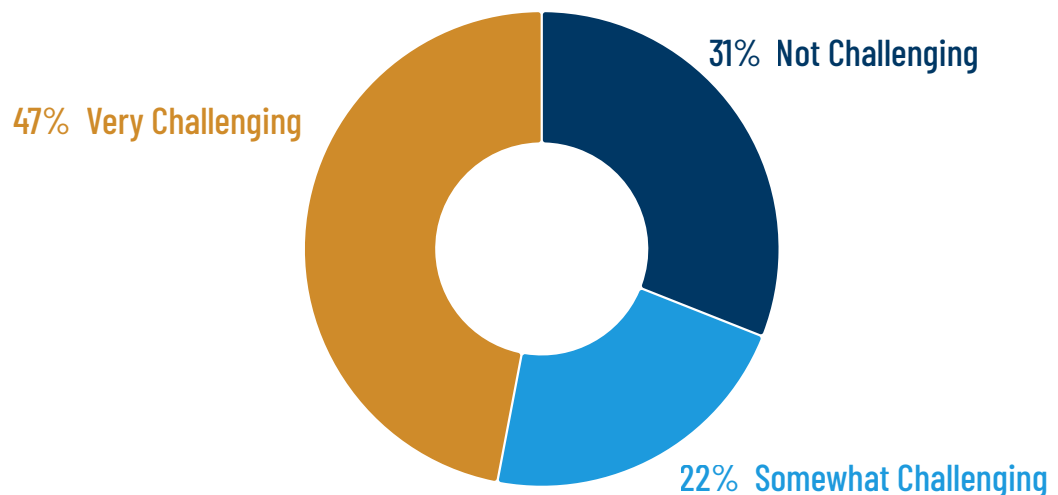
FCSS directors experience provincial funding for social services as episodic and identified the inconsistency of provincial funding and support for FCSS as a long-term problem. Several interviewees noted a pattern where the GOA will introduce a pilot program for social services

with limited-term funding (one to three years is common). In many cases, just when the program is starting to show results, the funding is inexplicitly dropped. Unexpected program restructuring and shifting government priorities contribute to challenges both in meeting government targets and in serving community members in a consistent, reliable way. From the perspective of FCSS, when funding for a program is ended, the reasons for the cut can be much better explained by a bias towards political novelty than by evidence of a need to revise policies.

The result of this sense of scarcity and instability, we were told, is increased territorialism between social service agencies. Organizations that could partner with each other instead may find themselves competing for funding. Many directors also pointed out that underfunding preventive social services ultimately results in increased social service costs. One director explained that “We put all of these dollars in ... intervention work, but if we put more money in ... prevention work ... we wouldn’t need as many dollars in intervention”.

The ending of the Parent Link program in late 2019 and early 2020 is an important example of this kind of unexpected program restructuring and funding instability. Results from the research team’s survey on this topic require some interpretation and possibly further research. In simplest terms, the survey results seem to show that the ending of the Parent Link program and its replacement with the Family Resource Network model (FRN) was either experienced as extremely challenging, or as not at all challenging. Roughly 31% of survey respondents rated the replacement of Parent Link by the FRN model as “not challenging,” while roughly 47% rated the replacement as “very challenging” (Figure 7, page 20). These two answers at opposite ends of the scale received the highest number of responses.

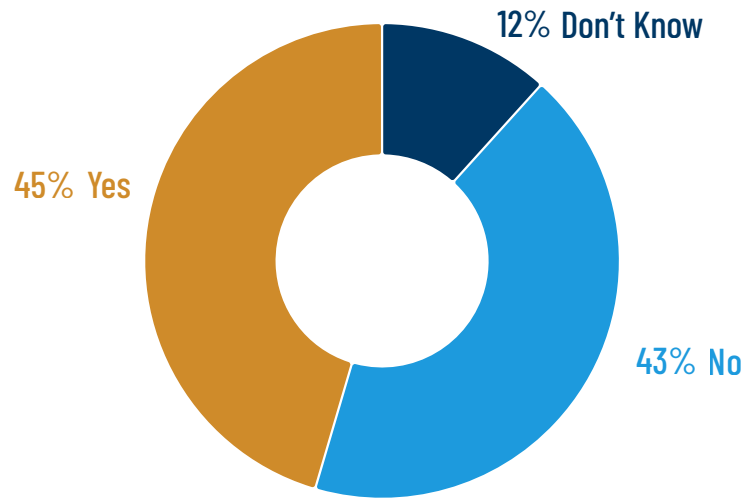
Figure 7: How challenging was the replacement of Parent Link Centres by Family Resource Networks for your FCSS program?¹¹



Similarly, respondents were evenly split on the effects of ending Parent Link. Just over 45% of respondents said that their FCSS program was negatively affected by the ending of the Parent Link program, while almost 43% of respondents indicated that the ending of Parent Link did not negatively affect their program (Figure 8, page 21).

¹¹ For readability purposes, this data was collapsed from a survey question that employed a 10-point Likert Scale asking respondents to rate “how challenging” this was from 1 (not challenging) to 10 (extremely challenging). In this chart, scores from 1 – 3 were collapsed into “not challenging”, scores 4 – 6 were collapsed into “somewhat challenging” and scores 7 – 10 were collapsed into “very challenging”.

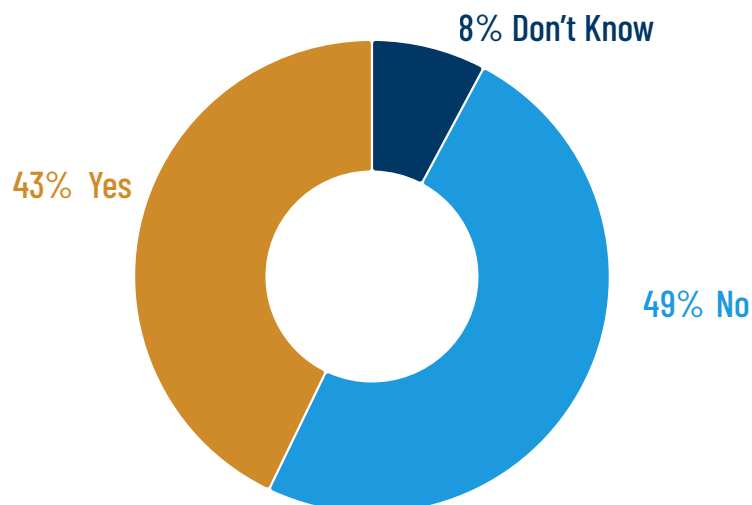
Figure 8: Was your FCSS program negatively affected by the ending of the Parent Link program?



Evidence given by interview participants was stronger and more clear-cut about the negative impacts of the ending of the Parent Link program and the transition to FRNs. Participants variously described the loss of Parent Link as “dramatic” and a “traumatic loss.” They described the transition to the FRNs as “abysmal” and “a chaotic mess” which introduced “a lack of clarity” about the role of FCSS in supporting child and youth development. Directors stated that the ending of Parent Link and transition to the FRN model was not just about funding. Many also expressed concerns related to a lack of clarity from the government about reporting expectations, goals and outcomes, and communication more generally.

Almost 59% of survey respondents answered that FRN funding was insufficient to adequately meet the needs of community members who had formerly attended Parent Link programming (Figure 9, page 21).

Figure 9: Has FRN funding allowed you to adequately meet the needs of community members who formerly attended Parent Link programming?





More than one director said that, under the FRN structure, they received about one-third of the funding they had received with Parent Link. As difficult to navigate as a two-thirds funding cut for early childhood programming must have been, the FRNs also imposed a requirement to expand the amount and type of services provided. Parent Link programs served families with children aged 0 – 6 years, while the FRNs cover ages 0 – 18. This means that FCSS programs which were successful in receiving FRN funding took on responsibility for providing services that meet the needs of families, children, and youth across a much wider range of developmental stages. Several directors expressed concern that the funding and administrative structure for the FRNs forced communities within the same region to compete for funding — something that has strained relationships between communities in certain cases.

Directors told us that in some cases their municipalities have stepped in to fund the programs that were formerly funded through Parent Link, while in other cases the loss of Parent Link and its funding had resulted in a loss of programming, jobs, and services. Directors agreed that programming for 0- to 18-year-olds was important but said that the expansion could have happened within the model already established by Parent Link. Directors agreed that the Parent Link model was much more functional, consistent, and easy to coordinate than the FRN model.

Rural-Specific Funding Challenges for FCSS Programs

Being rural significantly shapes the financial needs of FCSS programs. Many of the directors interviewed feel the GOA does not understand or appreciate the unique cost-of-living and opportunity constraints faced by rural communities. In particular, the research team heard about issues related to transportation and limited access to social services in rural communities. The team also heard from northern FCSS programs about the isolation their communities face and about how a recent economic downturn due to changes in the oil and gas industry is putting strain on residents and social programs. These and similar stories suggest that it is important to pay attention not only to ruralness as a factor in the social needs of Albertans but also to variation within rural Alberta, and to the geographic, socio-cultural, and economic reasons for this variation.

Many of the issues faced by rural FCSS programs can also be framed in terms of an urban-rural divide. FCSS directors were quick to tell us that they do not measure themselves against urban FCSS programs and that there is generally open communication and sympathy within FCSSAA and between rural and urban programs. Nevertheless, urban FCSS programs have significantly greater access to both financial and human resources. The research team heard several times that resources are more likely to go to Alberta's urban centres, and that grants tend to be geared more towards urban organizations with administrative, data collection, and analytical capacity. The knowledge that funding is more accessible to urban FCSS programs which already have larger budgets and greater personnel capacity is experienced by rural FCSS directors as a kind of arbitrary punishment: one director told us that rural communities are “penalized for being small” when it comes to accessing social service funding.

Almost every director noted that rural FCSS programs are incredibly important because there often are no other social services available in small communities. Rural FCSS directors feel that decision-makers in urban settings do not realize how few social services there are in rural



communities, which leads to underestimating the needs of rural communities and the complexity of the situations to which rural FCSS programs must respond. The research team was told that, in rural communities, FCSS programs cannot be specialized because there often are no other social service agencies, and that rural FCSS staff must be similarly flexible, adaptable, and able to wear “many different hats.” There is a strong perception on the part of rural FCSS directors that urban FCSS programs have a narrower social focus and more internal specialization due to their

proximity to other social service agencies and greater ease of access to outside professionals such as mental health counsellors. Rural FCSS directors count their flexibility and “jack of all trades” pragmatism as a strength, in part because it means that they feel connected to and knowledgeable about the social wellbeing of their communities. However, directors are aware that the flip side of being a “jack of all trades” means that there is no one else around that one can consult or bring in to offer specialized knowledge or support for complex social issues.

Directors repeatedly raised transportation as a significant barrier for rural residents. Simply put, there is a lack of public transportation or other affordable and reliable transportation options serving rural communities. Residents often live long distances from neighbours and from municipal centres wherein so many social and health support offices are located. Lack of access to transportation is particularly acute for people living on low or fixed incomes. One of FCSS’s important preventive roles is guarding against isolation and increasing social connection. If people are unable to travel to programming, FCSS’s capacity to reach people is limited.

Transportation is also an issue for more acute social and personal needs, such as attending medical appointments or appointments with other social service agencies, either locally or in the city. FCSS programs are generally prohibited from using designated governmental funding to offer transportation service. At least one director told the research team that their FCSS provides a transportation service that they pay for with non-FCSS funding because reducing barriers to participation is a core FCSS goal. Directors also emphasized the need to provide outreach services and to meet people where they live in cases where an individual is housebound or unable to travel.

Another infrastructure issue rural FCSS directors raised concerned lack of available, appropriate, and affordable space for programming. Rural communities often have a limited stock of buildings suitable to rent or borrow for events, and building new infrastructure is for the most part prohibitively expensive for FCSS programs with limited budgets.

One final significant piece the research team heard regarding rural FCSS programs’ funding challenges is that some rural communities have experienced population growth or economic development and have increased in importance as regional hubs. While this shift may suggest an important corrective to assumptions of rural decline, the team was told that provincial FCSS funding has not kept pace with, or has not yet recognized, this growth. FCSS programs in these communities now have more clients, but in at least some cases, have had to cut programming to shift resources to “maxed-out” programs.

Key Challenge 2: The Increasing Inaccessibility of Provincial Social Services in Rural Alberta

It is increasingly difficult for both rural residents and rural FCSS offices to access provincial government support services. This is partly the result of a long-running trend of the centralization of public services that has occurred in Alberta and elsewhere. In general, the story has been the same across Canada for more than three decades: stagnant populations in rural areas, combined with the ever-present search for “efficiencies” among cost-conscious provincial governments has led to a “retreat of the state” from rural areas. As one rural FCSS director noted, to the extent that services still exist in small communities, they are often “a shell of what they used to be.”

Nearly all FCSS directors who took part in this study highlighted the ongoing process of centralization of social services. They noted that, not only did these processes often unfold with little consultation or communication with key community stakeholders (including FCSS offices), this decline of services has significantly impacted rural community members who are dependent on government services but are now being asked to travel much farther at their own expense to a government office or healthcare facility for assistance. This presents a very real barrier for many community members for whom financial insecurity or health concerns make such travel difficult, if not impossible.

“For a long time, we have been talking with Alberta Supports and Alberta Works... We have been requesting that they provide a person on a regular basis, like once a month, to come to our office ... and there is an absolute refusal. There was zero interest in them being accessible out here. Their solution was that, if there are clients that need help, they can call their office and book an appointment to meet with those clients. But it still required a person to travel that 45 plus minutes.”



This is not a new observation with respect to the delivery of rural public services. However, what is increasingly evident for FCSS offices across rural Alberta is that, given that they are now very often “the only place in town” that is understood to offer social supports to community members in need, FCSS offices are often shouldered with additional requests for help from residents.

Part of this trend seems to have been by design on the part of the GOA. A significant concern raised frequently by FCSS directors is the ongoing “downloading” of additional responsibilities that were once within the purview of other provincial agencies onto FCSS offices, often without additional financial support or meaningful training. One FCSS director recounted a time wherein a designated provincial support worker would routinely visit the office to help local seniors with applications required to access certain supports or benefits. That worker eventually stopped coming and instead, “Our office got a PowerPoint and my staff are expected to go out and share the information on their services and benefits to the community.”

This may seem like an insignificant anecdote, but the research team heard a version of this story repeatedly during the study. The consistent downloading of tasks is further stressing FCSS programs across rural communities by increasing their workload without access to additional provincial funding.

A related outcome of centralization of support services is, even if rural FCSS programs are not technically being asked to “take on” additional responsibilities, because they are often “the only place in town” offering any type of supports, community members requiring help will frequently show up at FCSS offices with requests for assistance. However, such requests are often beyond the FCSS’s legislated mandate of providing preventative services and thus, technically, meant to be addressed by other agencies who, in many cases, no longer have a physical presence in the community.

As Figure 10, page 25 and Figure 11, page 26 show, the overwhelming majority of rural FCSS directors are being forced to extend their mandate and completing additional work beyond what they are funded to do. Importantly, there is a strong sense that these requirements have significantly increased since 2018 (Figure 12, page 26).

Figure 10: Do you feel your FCSS program is having to take on responsibilities that are meant to be the mandate of other provincial ministries or agencies?

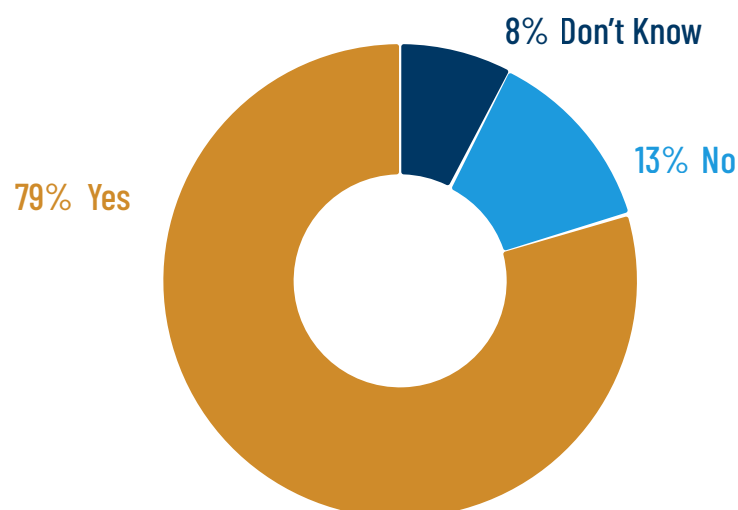


Figure 11: Does your FCSS program occasionally provide services to community members beyond those you understand to fall under the mandate of “prevention”?

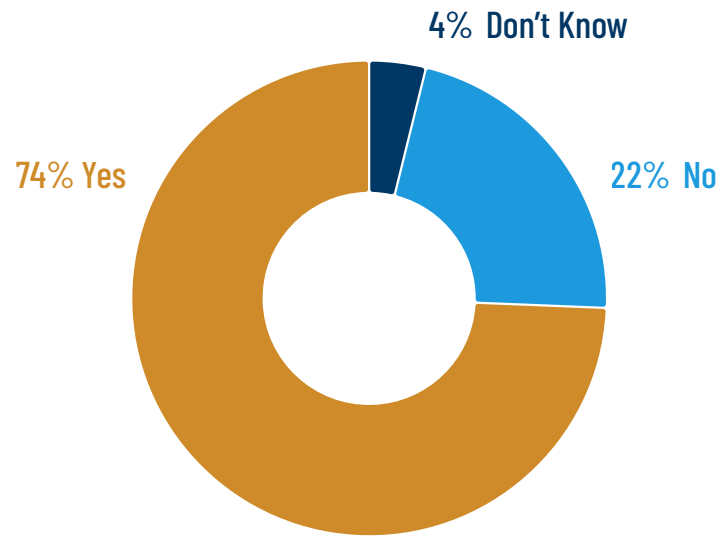
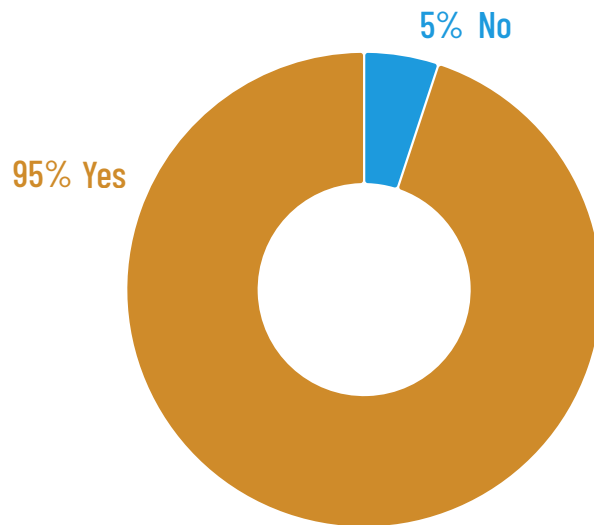


Figure 12: Has this pressure to provide services beyond “prevention” increased since 2018?



The Relational Realities of Rural Life

Pressure for FCSS offices to complete work beyond their mandate is amplified by the “relational reality” of small-town life. Compared to urban centres, there is a higher likelihood that members of a rural FCSS office have some personal connection or familiarity to the community member in need and thus feel an additional responsibility to help, even when the request is well outside FCSS’s mandate. Even if this relational component is not part of the equation in a given request for help from a community member, the fact that rural FCSS offices are more likely to provide direct services compared to urban FCSS offices (who are more likely to “grant-out” their funding to other organizations), make them more prone to being approached for this kind of help.

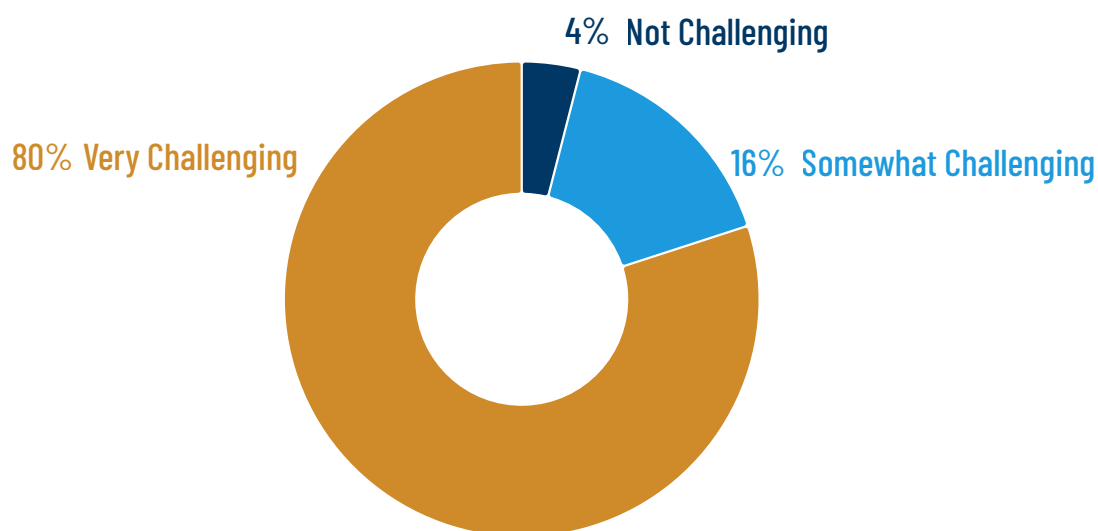
In either case, that rural FCSS offices have essentially become one of the last physical places (if not the only place) where people in need of social services can seek help, they are automatically placed in the unfair and untenable situation of having to go beyond their

mandate and provide intervention-type services (incurring the extra cost and effort this entails with no hope of being reimbursed) or turning away a community member in need, who may be someone they know personally, or at least someone they have a high likelihood of encountering again.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Shuttering of Additional In-person Support Services

This reality of rural FCSS offices as the only local site of social supports has intensified in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent decision by the GOA to shutter or reduce in-person services across several social service agencies (conversely, almost all rural FCSS offices remained open throughout the pandemic). Alberta Supports was the service most frequently mentioned in this context by FCSS directors, but it certainly is not the only example of social services offices closing. In place of provincial in-person services, those in need of assistance on a range of issues, such as mental health supports, victim services, senior supports, and AISH applications are increasingly required to call a “1-800” line or seek assistance via an online web platform or email. Every FCSS director interviewed for this study highlighted the negative impact of this change on their operational capacity. FCSS directors were asked about the severity of this challenge (Figure 13, page 27) and roughly 80% of respondents rated this as “very challenging.”

Figure 13: How challenging have increased community member requests due to the centralization of provincial services like Alberta Supports, Mental Health and Addictions, and Children’s Services, been for your FCSS program?¹²

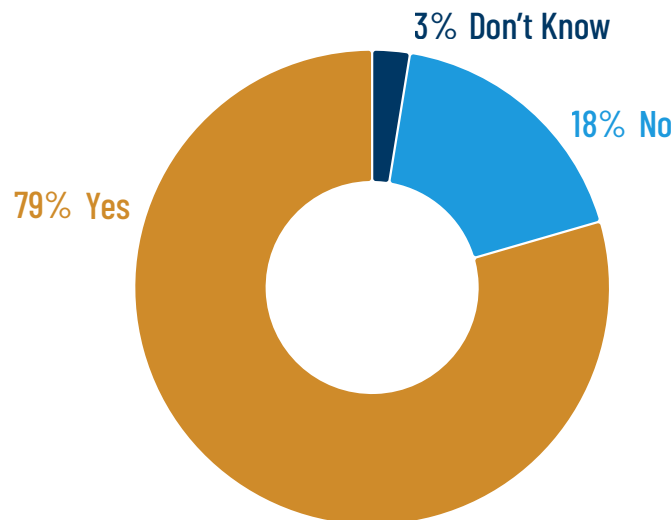


Online and telephone services have severe limitations for vulnerable people in rural communities. Several FCSS directors noted how difficult it can be for community members in need to navigate this new impersonal system. Stories of community members being left on hold for hours on end, of running out of minutes on their “pay as you go” cell phone plans while waiting for help, of attempting to navigate confusing web portals with poor internet service, and of seniors without email addresses being asked to “sign-in online” were very

¹² For readability purposes, this data was collapsed from a survey question that employed a 10-point Likert Scale asking respondents to rate “how challenging” this was from 1 (not challenging) to 10 (extremely challenging). In this chart, scores from 1 – 3 were collapsed into “not challenging”, scores 4 – 6 were collapsed into “somewhat challenging” and scores 7 – 10 were collapsed into “very challenging”.

common. For rural FCSS offices, this has led to a significant influx in community members seeking help. As noted in Figure 14, page 28, this has resulted in an increase in the amount of time FCSS staff must spend one-on-one with community members — time that is now no longer available for traditional preventative programming that is central to FCSS’s mandate.

Figure 14: Are your FCSS staff spending more time working with community members one-on-one since 2018?



This new reality is captured well in this extended quote from a long-time rural FCSS director:

“The lack of foresight when it comes to centralization of services, the 1-800 numbers, the online portals; these do not work for all people in our community, particularly those that are illiterate, that don’t have telephones, and that don’t have computer skills. And my growing concern is that we are skewing statistics to look like rural communities do not need services because they’re not able to access them.

When you look at seniors’ programs, seniors’ benefits, when you look at income support, when you look at even victim services, mental health services, continuing care, all of that has become a ‘1-800’ intake. So you take somebody who has mental health concerns, they’re on the line waiting for sometimes two, three hours, only to be cut off. And still not get to an actual appointment.

This is something that my staff experience on a daily basis with folks. Some days, we have five, six people in need come who come in here at their wit’s end, they have no money, no phone, no internet access, no ID, and we are the only ones that try to maneuver through the system with them.

And this is what’s happening in all of our rural communities. And we need a voice to say ‘no, this isn’t working.’ And my fear is that the provincial government is swinging the pendulum to a fully centralized intake system because it’s saving money, it’s efficient...

These things pull us away from what the true mandate of FCSS is. And so it does cause a lot of stress on the staff, a lot of burnout, and a lot of feelings of helplessness, almost because there’s nothing they can do.

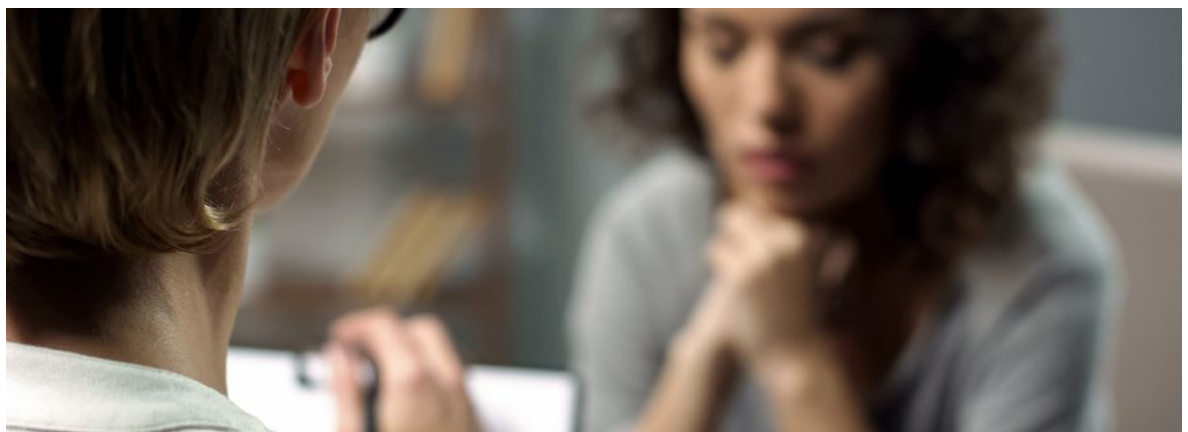
And I would say everybody in (our office) has thought about walking away. But their sense of responsibility won’t let them because they’re also the ones that look people in the eye, as opposed to the person on the other end of a ‘1-800’ call.”

Negative Impacts on Rural Clients

Unsurprisingly, not only has the recent move towards “1-800” lines and online platforms stressed rural FCSS offices, these changes have also resulted in noticeable negative impacts on rural citizens in need. Several rural FCSS directors spoke passionately about the reality of more vulnerable community members simply “falling through the cracks” and not receiving the help they require, and are entitled to, because the system has become far too inaccessible. Several FCSS directors recounted stories of people simply “giving up” and not pursuing the help they need. As the quote above suggests, there are legitimate fears that the true volume of “need” in rural communities is much more significant than what appears in provincial statistics because so many rural citizens either fail to navigate the new virtual reality of provincial supports or they have stopped trying. This was precisely the moral of one of the more dramatic (although not unique) stories shared with the research team:

“We had an individual that was threatening to commit suicide, or even take other people out because he was so frustrated with trying to navigate the provincial social services system. And so we did a bit of an intervention with him, and we were able to develop some supports that we could offer to him and support him, and help navigating some of those services. But I mean it, it was so bad that he was very serious about taking his own life. So, that’s just one example of where what happens when you have people that are already in challenging situations, and they just are getting the runaround from agencies and governments, and when there aren’t really clear lines about who is supposed to be doing what. I know there’s a lot of discussion in the FCSS world around the centralization of Alberta Supports. And I feel like we haven’t received as many clients requesting this type of help recently, and it’s mostly because people have given up.”

Even in cases where individuals are able to connect with support workers online or over the phone, many FCSS directors noted that such impersonal “virtual intakes” frequently fail to uncover the full range of services vulnerable people need. The result is “the loss of a continuum of service” wherein the social support system can “wrap around the entire client” and ensure they are both properly taken care of and receive the full multitude of supports they need. Further, clients no longer have a consistent contact person to follow up in this environment, leading to additional challenges accessing the required supports. Ultimately, as one rural FCSS director explained, “The actions of the provincial government [in transitioning to ‘1-800’ lines or online web portals for intakes and assistance] ... summarily dismissed people who are already disenfranchised.”



In summary, the ongoing centralization of social services in Alberta has generated significant challenges for rural FCSS programs and rural citizens — challenges that have only multiplied with the recent decision to fast-track a transition to telephone intake lines and online web portals for a variety of provincial social service supports (especially Alberta Supports) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because rural FCSS offices are often “the only shop in town,” they face a disproportionate burden compared to most of their urban counterparts. Indeed, this issue raises a serious equity concern. Multiple provincial agencies mandated to deliver supports to all Alberta citizens have increasingly reduced their in-person supports to rural Albertans. Rural FCSS offices are subsequently faced with helping vulnerable community members navigate this new system — a considerable task for offices already facing funding and capacity pressures. This in turn intensifies pressure on rural municipalities to increase funding to local FCSS programs, which has resulted in a significant increase in municipal overcontribution to FCSS programs across rural Alberta.

Key Challenge 3: Changing and Increasing Social Needs in Rural Communities

Rural FCSS directors were essentially unanimous in highlighting the changing nature and the overall increase of social service needs in their communities — two trends that have also placed new stresses on already taxed FCSS programs in rural Alberta. Although tracing precise causes of such complex trends is difficult, the FCSS directors we spoke with were adamant that both the COVID-19 pandemic and recent inflation are key drivers of changing and increasing client needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unique and difficult challenges for all Albertans. Rural FCSS directors spoke at length about a clear decline in the mental health of many of their clients, of the impacts of social isolation (especially for children and seniors), and increased anxiety related to both physical health and financial wellbeing. In addition, directors noticed new patterns of division within communities, decreased comfort levels in group settings, and declining levels of healthy behaviours in the wake of basically losing two years of FCSS group programming.

The current period of inflation has added more stress on many of the most vulnerable in our communities. Multiple FCSS directors spoke of “unprecedented demand” for the services of local food banks, of noticing more and more people “not eating,” and of a more general decline in the mental health of many given the overarching anxiety fast-rising prices of all key staples can cause in those populations without the means to absorb significantly higher costs. Several rural FCSS directors also noted increasing levels of homelessness in their communities, a trend that was already emerging prior to the pandemic, and has grown worse in the past few years.

Overall, rural FCSS directors are receiving more requests for assistance than previous years and are encountering more complex cases involving serious mental health issues, addictions, domestic abuse, crime, and individuals and families in serious financial distress. In short, the number of people who are walking through the doors of rural FCSS offices in crisis has increased dramatically in the past few years (See Figure 15, page 31 and Figure 16, page 31).

Figure 15: How often do your FCSS staff encounter community members who are in a state of crisis?

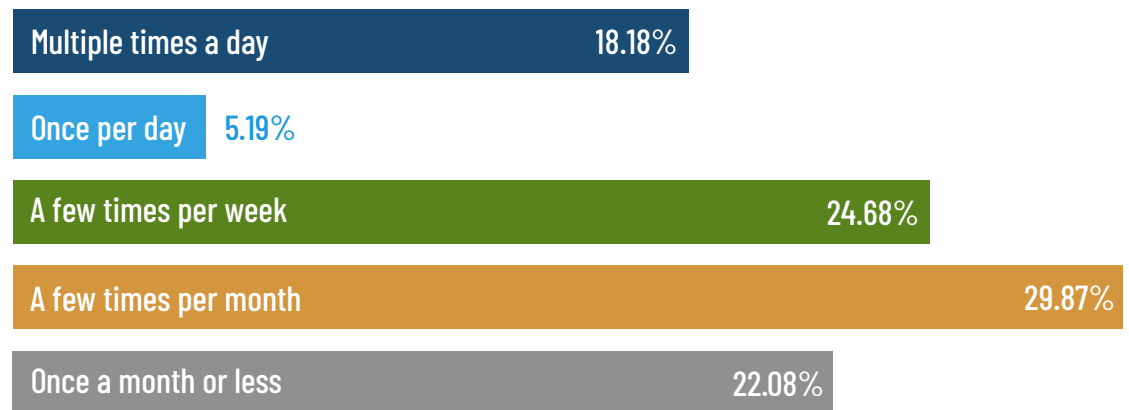
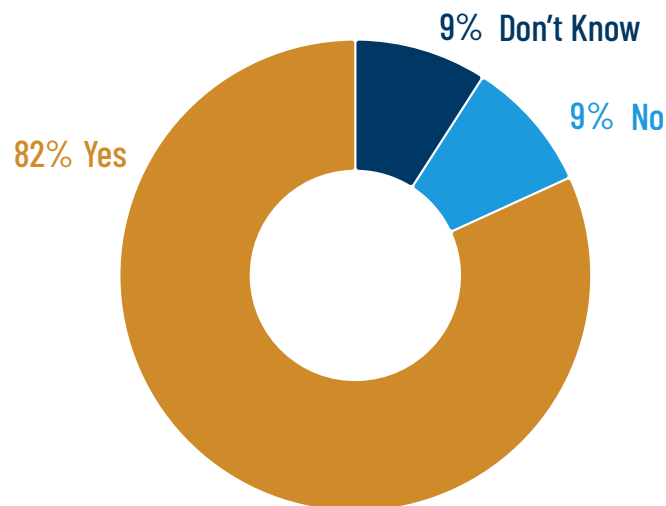
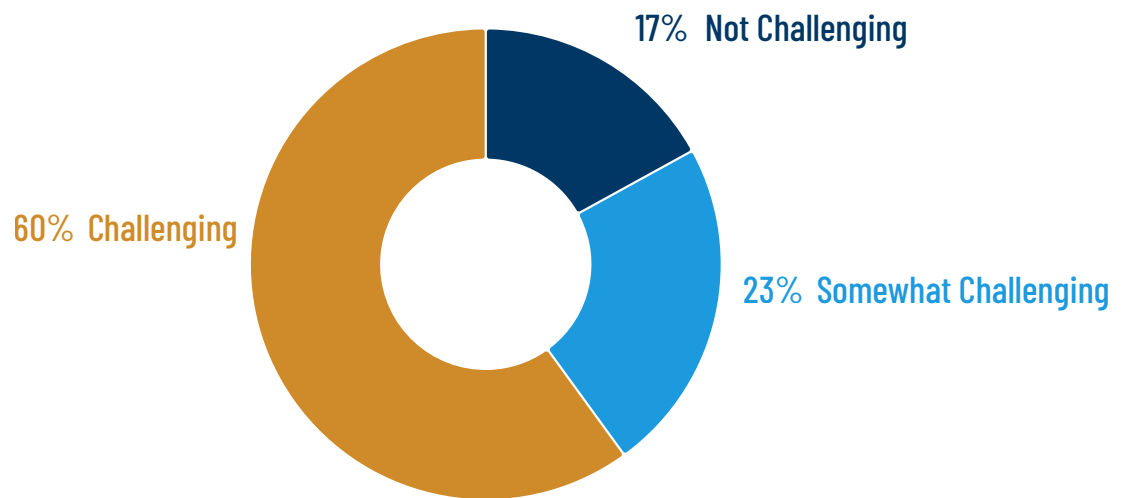


Figure 16: Have your FCSS staff experienced an increase in community members who are in a state of crisis since 2018?



These trends are especially problematic for rural FCSS offices because such cases clearly fall within the range of “intervention” rather than “prevention,” thus often pushing FCSS staff further beyond their legislated mandate. As discussed earlier, the “relational realities” of rural life make it especially difficult for rural FCSS staff to simply turn people in need of intervention away. Indeed, one clear outcome of this increased pressure that several rural FCSS directors noted was a noticeable rise in both workload and levels of personal stress among both FCSS staff and members of community organizations who partner with FCSS on local programming, often leading to what many respondents labelled as “staff burnout” (see Figure 17, page 32).

Figure 17: How challenging has the problem of staff burnout been in your FCSS office?¹³

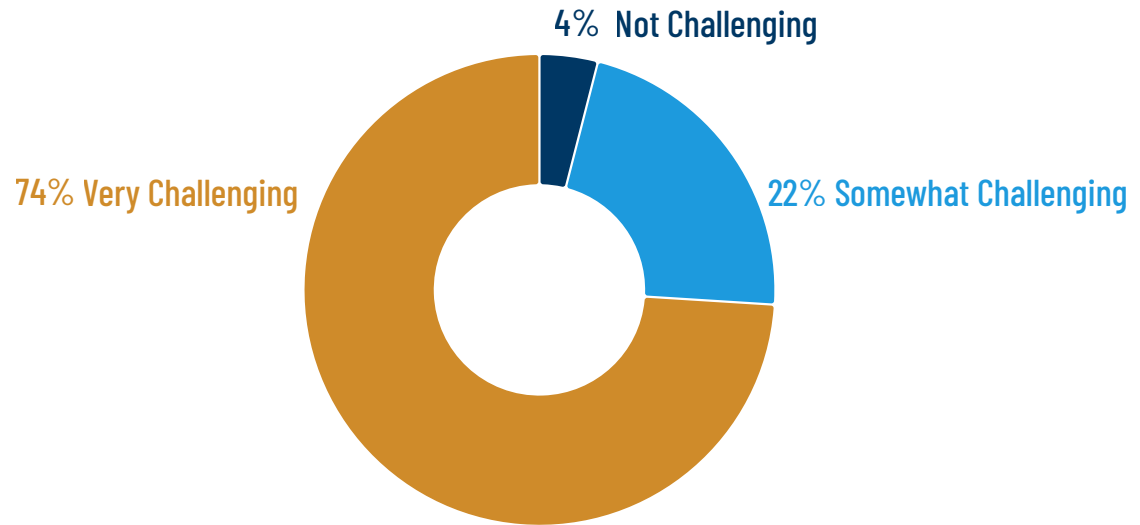


FCSS directors have faced increasing anxiety related to both the wellbeing of their staff and clientele, but also awareness that these patterns place even more fiscal pressure on their underfunded offices. In addition, many directors demonstrated a fair amount of despair in their conversations with us in response to their growing sense that provincial officials are simply unconvinced by their pleas regarding the increasingly dire situation facing both vulnerable individuals and rural FCSS offices.

Granted, the changing nature and increasing frequency of these social service needs are not localized to rural communities. It is likely that most urban social service providers across Alberta (if not North America and beyond) have noted similar patterns in the wake of the pandemic and the subsequent period of inflation. However, due to existing funding shortfalls and increasing client loads, these new challenges are pushing already taxed rural FCSS offices to the brink. FCSS directors were asked about the severity of this challenge (Figure 18, page 33) and roughly 74% of respondents deemed this to be “very challenging.”

¹³ For readability purposes, this data was collapsed from a survey question that employed a 10-point Likert Scale asking respondents to rate “how challenging” this was from 1 (not challenging) to 10 (extremely challenging). In this chart, scores from 1 – 3 were collapsed into “not challenging”, scores 4 – 6 were collapsed into “somewhat challenging” and scores 7 – 10 were collapsed into “very challenging”.

Figure 18: How challenging has increased demand for intervention-type services due to recent challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic or cost-of-living inflation to your FCSS program?¹⁴



Policy Recommendations

1. Increase Core Funding from the Province

The most commonly mentioned policy recommendation made by rural FCSS directors who participated in this study was simple: the provincial government must increase core funding for FCSS programs across the province. As mentioned earlier, provincial funding for FCSS programming remained capped at \$100 million from 2015 – 2022. In the meantime, several standard FCSS costs, from staff salaries to space rental to materials required for various on-the-ground programming have risen considerably. In this environment, many municipalities across rural Alberta have been forced to increase funding beyond their required 20% to prop up FCSS programs in their communities. Even with municipal overcontributions, the research team repeatedly heard about FCSS programs across rural Alberta facing significant fiscal pressure, often being forced to curtail programming, make smaller contributions to partnering community organizations, and reduce staff hours. Although the province increased overall funding to FCSS programs across the province by \$5 million in 2023, it is a near certainty that this amount will not be enough to address the key fiscal issues rural FCSS offices are facing.

A number of different ideas for ensuring more funds flow to rural FCSS offices were shared over the course of this study but, at minimum, it would be prudent for the provincial ministry to ensure annual increases in core funding are indexed to inflation. Given the emerging patterns of need discussed in the previous section, and the significant pressures the centralization of other social services puts on rural FCSS offices, there is an urgent need not only for funding to index with inflation but to increase significantly overall. Therefore, a significant increase to core funding that acknowledges the rising

¹⁴ For readability purposes, this data was collapsed from a survey question that employed a 10-point Likert Scale asking respondents to rate “how challenging” this was from 1 (not challenging) to 10 (extremely challenging). In this chart, scores from 1 – 3 were collapsed into “not challenging”, scores 4 – 6 were collapsed into “somewhat challenging” and scores 7 – 10 were collapsed into “very challenging”.



need for the types of vital services and programs FCSS offices provide to their community members is also recommended. Widespread municipal overcontribution essentially means that the provincial government is failing to uphold the funding parameters that govern FCSS operations in Alberta: 80% from the province and 20% from the municipality. A meaningful increase to core funding would help to return the provincial-municipal funding balance to what is demanded by the terms of the FCSS Regulation. In an environment wherein the provincial government is basking in significant budget surpluses and has made several large spending announcements across different jurisdictions in the past year, a serious increase to the core funding of FCSS programs in Alberta seems imminently doable.

In addition, the provincial government must do more to ensure the sustainability of core funding for FCSS programming. Several FCSS directors noted that the current practice of signing three-year funding contracts with individual FCSS programs creates an unnecessary level of anxiety, and even program inertia, for directors and staff, especially when these contracts are frequently renewed at “the very last moment.” Similar concerns were shared in relation to “pilot programs” the provincial government decides to fund. These should be funded for at least three (if not five) years, and should not be abruptly ended without significant consultation with FCSS directors. The degree of precarity faced by FCSS offices on both these fronts adds additional stress to programs that are already “maxed out”.

2. Increase the Accessibility of Provincial Social Support Services for Rural Albertans

In accordance with the second key challenge discussed above, the GOA must do more to ensure certain provincial social services remain or are returned to rural communities. No rural FCSS director we spoke with expected a full return of social services that once existed in rural Alberta decades ago. However, there are actions the GOA can take to lessen the load rural FCSS offices face in terms of the increased demand from community members given that they are often “the last shop in town” offering some social supports.

At a minimum, the province must revisit the decision to transition so many support services and client intakes to “1-800” lines and online web portals. Not only has this decision placed incredible stress on rural FCSS offices, it has also proven to have significantly negative impacts on vulnerable people throughout rural Alberta who find it very difficult, if not impossible, to navigate this new system. Re-opening the Alberta Supports offices that were shuttered over the pandemic would be the most appropriate first step in this direction.

More generally, a serious commitment from the GOA to ensure that more in-person social service supports are made available across a wider cross section of Albertan communities is required. While it is unrealistic to insist that every town and village across Alberta contain a selection of social service offices covering multiple issues, the province must ensure that there are physical offices within reasonable distances to all Alberta communities so rural Albertans can seek assistance in-person. Some additional assistance with transportation costs must also be included in such plans.

In addition, the GOA must reinvest in ensuring that social service workers who possess the capacity to truly help community members in need with various supports they are entitled to are travelling to and spending time in rural Alberta. The slow erosion of this practice has negatively impacted rural FCSS offices and vulnerable rural citizens. The principle of equitable treatment for all Albertans, urban and rural, requires revisiting this model.

3. Ensure that Future Public Policy Related to Social Service Delivery in Alberta is Approached via a Rural Lens

The practice of applying a “rural lens” to public policy decisions refers to an assessment that specifically considers how a proposed policy change will impact rural regions and peoples. To apply a “rural lens” to public policy decisions related to social service delivery in Alberta would require a careful and systematic consideration of the impact that any policy change in this area would have on rural Albertan communities and citizens.



Having outlined the challenges rural FCSS programs face, many recent decisions related to social service delivery in Alberta were not considered through a “rural lens.” Although FCSS programs across Alberta are facing increasing pressures in response to similar challenges, impacts are often felt most acutely by rural FCSS programs that bear most of the burden generated by the ongoing centralization of broader social service delivery. On a more technical note, the transition to the use of telephone and web portals by many social service agencies discounts the reality of both poor internet and spotty cellular service in rural regions. Although the past cannot be altered, future policy decisions related to provincial social services must more seriously engage with questions related to impacts on rural communities and citizens.

Throughout this study the team heard many ways in which ministries responsible for social service delivery could better anticipate the impacts of policy changes on rural Alberta. Several rural FCSS directors noted the current funding calculation that determines the provincial contribution to each FCSS program should take into account that the size and sparseness of rural communities leads to higher costs for offering different FCSS programs, and of sharing important information with community members. Similarly, although some consolidation and centralization of social services may be inevitable, rural FCSS directors insisted that, when relocating services, more must be done to understand the actual travel patterns that rural residents follow, rather than assuming that travelling to a location pre-determined by an Edmonton-based bureaucrat will be realistic for rural citizens from a specific community.

Several directors (although not all) were open to being more creative (and even somewhat radical) in terms of what rural FCSS programs can and should accomplish, given the realities they face. Rural FCSS offices are consistently “doing more with less” given the centralization of social service supports and the increasingly complex social challenges many rural Albertans are now facing. In such circumstances, more and more rural FCSS directors are asking whether they should take on an enlarged mandate capable of providing traditional “preventative” programming and additional “intervention-type” services and supports to community members in crisis given that no

local alternatives exist. Any such move in this direction would require careful planning, consultation, and enhanced resources from the GOA. Such an idea was not unanimously supported by the FCSS directors we spoke with. However, to even discuss it in a way that considers the impacts such a move would have on rural FCSS programs and community members is an example of applying a “rural lens” to an important debate about a large change in policy direction in rural Alberta. Evidence suggests that the time is now to have these conversations to ensure that social service delivery truly works for rural Albertans. The team heard too many examples that speak to the ways it currently does not.

4. Ensure that Social Service Policy in Alberta is Designed with Meaningful Contributions from Rural FCSS Programs

Building upon the previous point, “applying a rural lens” to policy discussions amounts to more than a study conducted from afar by urban-based policy makers. To apply a rural lens is to meaningfully engage, consult, and listen to the true “experts” in this field: the directors and staff in rural FCSS offices who are living the realities described in this report. Most recent social service-related policy decisions have been made without this type of engagement — a process that goes some way towards understanding how Alberta has ended up in this situation. In fairness, recent work around the creation of a new FCSS Accountability Framework engaged a wide cross section of rural FCSS directors, and one of the goals of the process was to better plot ways to improve coordination with social service agencies located in other ministries. But more must be done by the GOA to intentionally engage rural FCSS offices when making broader social service delivery decisions that will inevitably impact rural communities and, of course, the rural FCSS programs that are actually in the community and will be tasked, formally or informally, with dealing with the on-the-ground consequences.





* CONCLUSION

FCSS is a crucial service in towns, villages, and rural communities across Alberta. Relying on the efforts of dedicated staff and supported by municipal decision-makers, FCSS offices in every corner of the province support strong families, connected seniors, and healthy children. In other words, FCSS is a massive part of what makes Alberta's rural communities great.

This report shows that the efforts and passion of FCSS leaders in doing whatever it takes to support everyone in their communities, even the most vulnerable, has been compromised by systematic provincial downloading of responsibility and underfunding of FCSS services. FCSS services are doing more than ever before without the requisite training, funding, and capacity support. This situation leads to unfair pressure on municipalities, unreasonable expectations on FCSS staff, and additional stress to vulnerable rural Albertans.

The RMA will continue to advocate to government for proper funding of FCSS services, and adequate local availability of social services that are the responsibility of the province to deliver. This report tells an indisputable story: FCSS offices are going above and beyond to soften the local impacts of provincial underfunding and service level reductions.



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