

Report of the Auditor General of Canada  
to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut

## 2025 Follow-up on Child and Family Services in Nunavut



### **WARNING**

The content of this audit report and the materials related to it may negatively impact readers.

**Independent Auditor's  
Report | 2025**



Office of the  
Auditor General  
of Canada

Bureau du  
vérificateur général  
du Canada

This publication is available on our website at [www.oag-bvg.gc.ca](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca).

*Cette publication est également offerte en français et en Inuktitut.*

ᑕᐱᑦ ᓂᓂᓴᓴᑦᑕᑦᑕᑦᑕᑦᑕᑦ ᑕᑦᑕᑦᑕᑦᑕᑦᑕᑦ ᑕᑦᑕᑦᑕᑦᑕᑦ

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Auditor General of Canada, 2025.

Cat. No. FA3-182/1-2025E-PDF

ISBN 978-0-660-75557-1

Cover photo: Office of the Auditor General of Canada

# At a Glance



## Overall message

In 2023, our audit report on child and family services in Nunavut described a system in crisis, plagued by failures across all areas examined. This was the third time since 2011 that the Office of the Auditor General of Canada raised these concerns. The report urged the Government of Nunavut to take immediate action to protect the vulnerable children and youth of the territory.

This status update, almost 2 years after the last audit, found that while the territory's Department of Family Services had taken initial actions to address the failures affecting services for children, youth, and families, much work remains to be done to ensure that children and youth receive the protection they are entitled to under Nunavut's [Child and Family Services Act](#).

The department developed a strategic action plan with 80 action items aimed at improving protection and support services for children, youth, and families in Nunavut. While the strategic action plan is wide ranging, it lacks the targets and baselines needed to measure progress, specific timelines, and clear accountabilities. To focus its efforts and strengthen accountability, the department needs to prioritize actions with clear timelines for measuring progress.

While an action plan is an important starting point, we urge the Government of Nunavut to accelerate its actions to protect the territory's vulnerable children and youth. Given the significant amount of work that remains to be done to change outcomes for children, youth, and their families, this is the first of what will be regular status updates to monitor actions taken to respond to our findings.

## Key facts and findings



- The Department of Family Services had started reviews of individual files of children and youth placed for care outside of the territory and the facilities where they were placed.
- A first round of safety checks took place by the Department of Family Services in September-October 2024 for children within the territory who were receiving care and support from the department.
- The Department of Family Services launched a new file management system at the end of November 2023, but it was not being used by all community social services workers to manage individual files.
- The Department of Family Services had compiled a list of children and youth for whom it was providing care and support, and it was working to keep the list current and complete.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Focus of the audit</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Findings</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Department of Family Services took actions to improve services to children and youth, but there was substantial work that remained to be done</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Initial actions taken to improve responses to referrals, how investigations are conducted, and case management.....	3
<b>The Department of Family Services started to address the causes of deficiencies in the delivery of services meant to aid vulnerable children and youth</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Slight increase to frontline service capacity .....	9
Several updates made to staff training.....	12
New information management system in place but not yet used by all staff .....	13
<b>The Department of Family Services took actions to better support the health, safety, and well-being of employees</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Counselling services provided to Family Wellness staff .....	16
<b>The Department of Family Services prepared a strategic action plan, but it was missing many essential elements</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Strategic action plan lacked key elements for accountability .....	17
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>About the Audit</b>	<b>19</b>

# Introduction

## Background

### Previous audit reports

1. In Nunavut, intergenerational trauma resulting from colonialism and the residential school system, compounded by social and economic challenges such as inadequate housing, food insecurity, poverty, and geographic remoteness, creates a complex range of issues that put some children and families at risk and in need of child protection and family services.
2. In May 2023, the Auditor General of Canada released an [audit report on child and family services in Nunavut](#). The audit concluded that the Department of Family Services had consistently failed to take action to protect and support the well-being of vulnerable children, youth, and their families in accordance with legislation, policy, and program requirements.
3. The audit found significant deficiencies in the Department of Family Services' case management and supervision of children and youth under its care. In particular, there were significant weaknesses in how the department
  - responded to reports of suspected harm
  - conducted investigations
  - supported children and youth receiving care and supports from the department, including children and youth in foster care
  - supported those placed in care facilities outside of the territory
4. The audit identified long-standing issues that in our opinion contributed to those deficiencies. These issues included funding, staffing, staff housing and office space, training, and information management.
5. The 2023 audit report was the third conducted by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada on the topic of child and family services in Nunavut:
  - In 2011, we concluded that the Department of Health and Social Services was not adequately meeting its key responsibilities for the protection and well-being of children, youth, and their families.
  - In 2014, we followed up on the 2011 audit and reported that the Department of Family Services had made unsatisfactory progress in complying with key child protection standards and ensuring ongoing human resources capacity to fulfill its mandate.

6. Our 2011 and 2014 reports included recommendations that were agreed to by the departments we audited, including the Department of Family Services. In 2023, we had yet to see vulnerable children and youth receive the protection they are entitled to under the [Child and Family Services Act](#). For that reason, we made the decision to not issue more recommendations in our 2023 report, as the previous recommendations still needed to be addressed by the department.

---





## Roles and responsibilities

7. **Department of Family Services.** The department is responsible for delivering programs and services related to child and family services, poverty reduction, income assistance, and career development. Within the department, the Family Wellness division provides support services for children, youth, and vulnerable adults who may require protection or other specialized support. The division assists individuals, families, groups, and communities to develop skills and make use of both personal and community resources to enhance their well-being.

## Focus of the audit

8. This audit focused on whether the Department of Family Services had made progress in improving services to protect and support the well-being of vulnerable children and youth and their families in accordance with legislation, policy, and program requirements.

9. The work done for this audit examined actions the department had taken between May 2023 and October 2024, and what progress had been achieved. We assessed and rated progress as follows:

-  No actions taken—no progress
-  Some actions taken—progress enabled
-  Actions taken—some progress
-  Significant actions taken—substantial progress and improved outcomes

10. Given the persistent lack of progress found in past audit reports, this follow-up audit is important because it provides information on the actions the Department of Family Services is taking, with the support of other government departments, and the outcomes being achieved in terms of improving services to Nunavut's vulnerable children, youth, and their families.

11. In view of the long-standing lack of progress in improving services to children and families in Nunavut, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada has decided to perform regular status updates to

examine the actions of the Department of Family Services to address past audit findings and recommendations. This report is the first of these status updates.

12. More details about the audit objective, scope, approach, and criteria are in [About the Audit](#) at the end of this report.

## Findings

### The Department of Family Services took actions to improve services to children and youth, but there was substantial work that remained to be done

---

#### Context

13. In our 2023 audit, we found significant deficiencies in the areas examined, including

- responding to reports of suspected harm
- conducting investigations
- case management
- following up with children, youth, and young adults placed in care in Nunavut or elsewhere in Canada

14. In both our 2011 and 2014 audits, we also found that key responsibilities for the protection and well-being of children, youth, and their families were not being met by the Department of Family Services.

### Initial actions taken to improve responses to referrals, how investigations are conducted, and case management

---


#### Findings

15. We found that the Department of Family Services took actions to strengthen how it responds to referrals, how investigations are conducted, case management, and the delivery of services in support of children, youth, and their families ([Exhibit 1](#)). Since fall 2023, the department's work has been led by the new Assistant Deputy Minister of Family Wellness and the new Territorial Director of Family Wellness.

16. We found that substantial work remained to be done. For example, case files and related documentation that was received from the department and Nunavut's Representative for Children and Youth indicated that there were still serious concerns over how the department


responds to referrals and undertakes investigations. Enhancing case management quality is a priority of the Family Wellness Ilaġiitsiarniq Strategic Action Plan 2023-2028. This includes developing a quality assurance program that would not only promote accountability and continuous improvement but also enable the department to know whether its services are improving and whether the needs of vulnerable children and youth are being met. However, we found that the department lacked capacity in this area.

**Exhibit 1—Initial actions were taken to improve responses to reports of suspected child abuse, investigations, case management, and the delivery of services**

What we looked for	Actions taken by the department	Assessment of progress
<p>The Department of Family Services improved its response to reports of child abuse, harm, and neglect toward meeting Family Wellness standards requirements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since early 2024, the department has been updating its standards and procedures for responding to reports of suspected abuse and conducting investigations. These revised standards and procedures were not in effect as of 31 October 2024.</li> <li>• To improve the reporting and response to suspected cases of child abuse and neglect, the department was leading a review of the Surusinut Ikajuqtigiit, Nunavut Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement. The agreement is between various Government of Nunavut departments, and other interested parties, and outlines the appropriate response, roles, and responsibilities of all those concerned in responding to child abuse and neglect disclosures.</li> <li>• To improve its response to referrals of child abuse, harm, and neglect, the department was delivering renewed training for community social services workers (CSSWs). Starting in May 2024, the Territorial Director of Family Wellness also began holding regular meetings with supervisors and regional managers to discuss expectations regarding standards and procedures and provide feedback on staff supervision.</li> <li>• The department concluded that because of inconsistent approaches to tracking referrals, the historical information it had on the number and type of referrals it received on suspected cases of child abuse and neglect was unreliable. To improve consistency and reliability, the coding of referrals was redesigned and incorporated into the department’s new information management system, Matrix. However, this system was not yet used by all staff (<a href="#">Exhibit 5</a>).</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Some actions taken—progress enabled</p>






What we looked for	Actions taken by the department	Assessment of progress
<p>The Department of Family Services is better meeting the needs of children and their families in accordance with Family Wellness standards.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve case management and compliance with the department’s standards and procedures, starting in May 2024, the Territorial Director of Family Wellness held regular meetings with supervisors and regional managers to discuss expectations regarding standards and procedures and provide feedback on staff supervision.</li> <li>• In August 2024, CSSWs were directed by senior management to immediately perform face-to-face safety checks to verify the safety and well-being of all children and youth in the territory who received services from the department. Regional reports were provided to senior management in October and November 2024 that summarized the outcomes of the safety checks that were performed. The department planned to continue with these monthly exercises. We noted that the department’s standards and procedures already require that monthly check-ins to assess the safety and well-being of children and youth take place. However, reporting to senior management on the outcomes of these check-ins is not required.</li> <li>• Enhancing case management quality, efficiency, and collaboration is a priority of the Family Wellness Iłagiitsiarniq Strategic Action Plan 2023-2028. This includes conducting quality reviews and compliance audits to ensure high standards in case management, leading to better outcomes for children and youth. In January 2024, the department hired a manager for quality improvement. As of 31 October 2024, there was no team in place to support the manager. To partially fill this gap, a social worker was contracted in October 2024 to support the manager. The social worker had started 1 compliance review of a case file with the objective of identifying areas in need of improvement, identifying deficiencies in interviewing and documentation, and identifying training opportunities for CSSWs, supervisors, and managers. The review was ongoing at the time of the audit and was expected to be completed in early January 2025.</li> <li>• Overall, 3 quality assurance reviews of the department’s delivery of services involving 3 children and youth had been done. The focus of 2 of these reviews was the department’s response to referrals and subsequent investigations in relation to suspected child abuse. The third review did not involve a case of suspected child abuse.</li> </ul>	<p> Some actions taken—progress enabled</p>

What we looked for	Actions taken by the department	Assessment of progress
<p>The Department of Family Services improved its case management of children and youth placed outside Nunavut, maintained their connection to their family, and ensured that they received culturally appropriate services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The department created the new position of interjurisdictional placement specialist to manage the placement of children and youth outside of Nunavut by liaising with child welfare agencies where children were placed.</li> <li>• The interjurisdictional placement specialist checked the accuracy of information for each child and youth placed outside of Nunavut. The information checked included the type of placement (for example, foster home, group home) and the status of agreements in place between the department and child welfare organizations where children and youth were placed.</li> <li>• The department was working with jurisdictions outside of Nunavut to put in place <b>interprovincial placement agreements</b><sup>1</sup> (IPPAs) for children and youth placed outside of Nunavut for care: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On 31 January 2024, 3 signed IPPAs were in place. At the end of October 2024, signed IPPAs were in place for 31 of 91 children and youth placed outside of Nunavut.</li> <li>• For the remaining children and youth, the IPPAs were in development. The department encountered delays in completing IPPAs, as it was waiting for the CSSW in the child’s or youth’s home community in Nunavut to provide documentation.</li> <li>• As of the end of October 2024, of the 91 children and youth that were out-of-territory placements, 75% had a <b>courtesy worker</b><sup>2</sup> assigned to them. Courtesy supervision allows the department to utilize resources in other jurisdictions; however, CSSWs are ultimately responsible for ensuring care plan requirements and departmental standards are met.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"> Some actions taken—progress enabled</p>





<sup>1</sup> **Interprovincial placement agreement (IPPA)**—A standardized agreement negotiated between Nunavut and the jurisdiction where a child or youth is placed. The IPPA describes respective roles and responsibilities in serving a child or youth. These agreements are established under the 2016 Provincial/Territorial Protocol on Children, Youth and Families Moving Between Provinces and Territories.

<sup>2</sup> **Courtesy worker**—A worker who can be requested by the Department of Family Services to provide courtesy supervision and monitoring when a child or youth is placed outside of Nunavut for care under the 2016 Provincial/Territorial Protocol On Children, Youth and Families Moving Between Provinces and Territories. The courtesy worker is employed by the province, territory, or protection agency where the child or youth is placed.

What we looked for	Actions taken by the department	Assessment of progress
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The department revised its standards and procedures for placing children and youth out of territory. The revisions clarified the role of client liaison officers in terms of providing cultural supports to children and youth. A family-centred wellness planning meeting is also required so that the child's or youth's family or parents are involved in placement decisions. The department also created a new standard for placing children and youth outside of Nunavut in emergency circumstances. These standards and procedures came into effect in June 2024.</li> <li>• The department hired a contractor in mid-2024 to visit care facilities to review files of all children and youth who were placed outside of Nunavut. The file reviews were to cover several aspects, such as the existence of care plans, progress reports, and incident reports prepared by the care provider. Other topics, such as programming, clinical processes, staff capacity, cultural connections, and whether contact with family and the child's or youth's community was encouraged, were also being reviewed. Whether the level of care provided met what was called for in the service contract and the individual's care plan was also being assessed.</li> <li>• As of 31 October 2024, the review of 1 care facility involving 1 individual was completed. All reviews are to be completed by the end of March 2025.</li> </ul>	
<p>The Department of Family Services improved its monitoring of out-of-territory residential care facilities (for compliance with safety, licensing, and service contract requirements).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The revised standards and procedures for out-of-territory placements took effect in June 2024. The standards and procedures include roles and responsibilities for conducting annual reviews of facilities, as well as licensing and insurance verifications.</li> <li>• The department contacted care facilities to confirm licensing and tracked this information.</li> <li>• As part of the work being undertaken by the contractor hired in mid-2024 to review out-of-territory care, each care facility where children and youth were placed was also being inspected. The inspections cover topics such as accreditation, licensing, insurance, the condition of the facility, safety procedures, and standard operating procedures.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"> Some actions taken—progress enabled</p>

What we looked for	Actions taken by the department	Assessment of progress
<p>The Department of Family Services improved how it conducts reviews and visits of children and their foster families toward meeting its standards and procedures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In May 2023, the department’s regional foster care coordinator positions were vacant in the Kitikmeot and Kivalliq regions. These positions were filled as of 31 October 2024. The position for South Baffin was filled for approximately 9 months but was vacant as of 31 October 2024. There was no funded position for North Baffin.</li> <li>• These coordinators were responsible for recruiting foster parents; maintaining records of home studies, criminal record checks, and vulnerable sector checks; and overseeing payments to foster parents. CSSWs were responsible for visiting children and their foster families.</li> <li>• The department did not have a consolidated picture of the status of criminal record checks, vulnerable sector checks, and home studies for each foster parent.</li> <li>• The safety checks of children and youth in care within the territory that were undertaken by the department in September and October 2024 included children and youth in foster care.</li> <li>• Key standards and procedures regarding children and youth in foster care, such as minimum contact guidelines and how to conduct criminal record checks, vulnerable sector checks, and home studies, had not yet been updated. Updating the foster care standards and procedures to reflect leading practices is a long-term action item in the Family Wellness Ilagiitsiarniq Strategic Action Plan 2023-2028.</li> </ul>	 <p>Some actions taken—progress enabled</p>
<p>The Department of Family Services improved the supervision and support to community social services workers to perform their duties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In May 2023, 8 of the 13 supervisor positions (61%) were filled with permanent employees. This increased to 11 in October 2024 (85%). The remaining positions were filled with casual employees.</li> <li>• The department issued guidance materials on supervision to regional management. Training for managers and supervisors was delivered 5 times from January to October 2024. Five permanent and 1 casual supervisor (out of 14 permanent and casual supervisors) had taken this training.</li> <li>• The Territorial Director of Family Wellness held regular meetings with supervisors and regional managers to discuss expectations and provide feedback on staff supervision and adherence to case management standards.</li> </ul>	 <p>Some actions taken—progress enabled</p>

**Legend—Assessment of progress**

-  No actions taken—no progress
-  Some actions taken—progress enabled
-  Actions taken—some progress
-  Significant actions taken—substantial progress and improved outcomes

## The Department of Family Services started to address the causes of deficiencies in the delivery of services meant to aid vulnerable children and youth

---

### Context

17. Our 2023 audit attributed the Department of Family Services' inability to meet its responsibilities for Nunavut's children and youth to insufficient funding, staffing, housing, and office space, as well as a lack of timely training of staff and poor information management. These observations echoed those of our audits in 2011 and 2014. We examined actions taken by the department to address these specific deficiencies between May 2023 and October 2024.



### Slight increase to frontline service capacity


---

### Findings





18. We found that the Department of Family Services received new funding following Nunavut's 2024–25 budget. We also found that the department hired additional staff and filled several vacant community social services worker (CSSW) positions. The department was also working on enhancing capacity through direct appointments of casual CSSWs to permanent positions and using a team of contracted CSSWs ([Exhibit 2](#)). Nonetheless, the department continued to face staffing challenges as evidenced by the temporary closure of local Family Wellness offices in 13 of Nunavut's 25 communities between May 2023 and October 2024.

## Exhibit 2—Efforts to improve frontline capacity were ongoing

What we looked for	Actions taken by the department	Assessment of progress
<p>The Department of Family Services analyzed service needs and improved frontline service capacity consistent with those needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The department identified the resources required to increase capacity and improve child protection services, including the types of positions needed and the number of new staff needed. The analysis went beyond community social services workers (CSSWs) and included family resource worker positions, as well as staff in areas such as human resources, training, and occupational health and safety. As noted in <a href="#">Exhibit 1</a>, the department was taking actions to make its information on referrals of child abuse, harm, and neglect more reliable, which should help the department assess its service and frontline capacity needs.</li> <li>The department consulted staff across the territory who raised issues such as heavy workloads and unbalanced workload distribution among frontline workers, including CSSWs.</li> </ul>	 <p>Actions taken—some progress</p>
<p>The Department of Family Services filled a significant portion of community social services worker positions with permanent employees in all communities and addressed systemic retention issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The department received \$3.1 million in new funding from Nunavut's 2024–25 budget to create 31 additional positions. This included 21 new CSSW positions (<a href="#">Exhibit 3</a>) and 4 family resource worker positions.</li> <li>Between 31 May 2023 and 31 October 2024, the department filled 8 permanent CSSW positions (increasing the number of permanent CSSWs from 26 to 34 over a total of 68 CSSW positions (<a href="#">Exhibit 3</a>)).</li> <li>As of 31 October 2024, of the 6 communities that did not have a CSSW in May 2023, 5 had a permanent or casual CSSW in that community. On 31 October 2024, 3 communities—Naujaat, Whale Cove, and Kugaaruk—did not have a permanent or casual CSSW. We were informed that the reason was a lack of staff housing.</li> <li>The department continued to use casual contracts to fill CSSW positions (approximately 49% of CSSW positions were filled with casuals as of 31 October 2024, compared with 47% in May 2023). Overall, the number of casual CSSWs increased from 23 in May 2023 to 33 in October 2024 (<a href="#">Exhibit 3</a>).</li> </ul>	 <p>Actions taken—some progress</p>

What we looked for	Actions taken by the department	Assessment of progress
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work was underway to directly appoint up to 9 casual CSSWs to indeterminate positions.</li> <li>• To enhance its frontline capacity, the department contracted a team of social workers from outside of Nunavut to address urgent needs and anticipated engaging and deploying a second team.</li> <li>• To address the lack of staff housing, the department secured approval from the Nunavut Housing Corporation to have full-time indeterminate staff use housing units set aside for transient (for example, casual) workers in communities that do not have sufficient housing. Three full-time employees were using these types of units. Lack of staff housing was still a barrier to recruitment.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services hired a capital planner to assist with managing its office space needs. The department also assessed its office space needs and was in communication with the Department of Community and Government Services to address these needs in selected communities. The Department of Family Services still had no permanent replacement for its office space that was lost because of a fire in Sanikiluaq in early 2023.</li> </ul>	
<p>The Department of Family Services has increased the number of Inuit in its workforce (frontline social work positions) in line with its Inuit Employment Plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2023, the department created the Rebekah Uqi Williams Scholarship, awarded annually to up to 5 eligible Nunavut Inuit and Nunavummiut students who demonstrate a desire to improve and advance the interests of Nunavummiut in all communities through the study and practice of social work, counselling, or psychology.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services had worked with the Department of Human Resources to create a CSSW internship program for Inuit graduates from the Nunavut Arctic College's social work program. The program was to be launched in 2025.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services had not increased the number of permanent Inuit CSSWs since May 2023.</li> </ul>	 <p>Some actions taken—progress enabled</p>

**Legend—Assessment of progress**

-  No actions taken—no progress
-  Some actions taken—progress enabled
-  Actions taken—some progress
-  Significant actions taken—substantial progress and improved outcomes

**Exhibit 3—Summary of changes in the number and status of community social services workers (CSSWs) (May 2023 to October 2024)**

Type of position	Number of CSSWs as of May 2023	Number of CSSWs as of October 2024	Change between May 2023 and October 2024
Total number of funded CSSW positions	47	68	+21 positions (+45%)
Employed permanent	26	34	+31%
Employed casual	23	33	+43%
Number of vacant funded positions	21	34	+62%*

\* Of the 21 vacancies in May 2023, one third had been filled by October 2024.

## Several updates made to staff training


---

### Findings





19. We found that the Department of Family Services had taken actions to update the core training materials for the Family Wellness division staff and had started delivering revised core training sessions to staff ([Exhibit 4](#)).



### Exhibit 4—Updated training was made available to staff

What we looked for	Actions taken by the department	Assessment of progress
<p>The Department of Family Services provided training on departmental standards and procedures for child protection, as well as orientation and onboarding on Inuit culture, to a significant portion of community social services workers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The department revised the Family Wellness Core Training Program with updated content on Inuit Societal Values.</li> <li>According to the department's data, 31 permanent and casual community social services workers out of a total of 67 employed community social services workers attended the revised Family Wellness Core Training Program as of 31 October 2024. Only 1 of the 14 permanent and casual supervisors had taken the core training by the end of October 2024.</li> <li>In September 2024, the revised Family Wellness Core Training Program was made available to all staff through an online platform. Staff already on duty were granted 6 months to complete the online program; new staff were given 4 months after their hiring date to complete the program. This will help ensure staff do not go for extended periods without receiving training.</li> <li>The department offered supervisors and local and regional managers a series of awareness sessions in 2024 on the new standards and procedures for placing children and youth outside of the territory. However, the department did not track attendance for these sessions.</li> <li>In our 2023 audit, we found that the department had only 1 staff member to do all the work related to training. Two new staff, including a manager, were added to the Family Wellness division's training team as of September 2024.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Actions taken—some progress</p>

#### Legend—Assessment of progress

-  No actions taken—no progress
-  Some actions taken—progress enabled
-  Actions taken—some progress
-  Significant actions taken—substantial progress and improved outcomes

### New information management system in place but not yet used by all staff


#### Findings


20. We found that the Department of Family Services launched a new information management system—Matrix—at the end of November 2023. However, Matrix was not yet being used by all community social services workers to record and manage their work. The department identified that resistance to change and a need for training were barriers to the universal use of Matrix. As a result, Matrix

did not include data on all new cases. This meant that Matrix could not be used to produce complete reports of information on all children and youth managed by the department—for example, to know the number of children and youth receiving services from the department and the details of their cases.





21. We found that the Department of Family Services manually compiled a list of children and youth who were receiving care and support from the department. This included children and youth receiving care both in the territory and those placed outside of the territory for care. However, we found that there were inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the latest version of the department’s list that we examined (for example, inconsistent information regarding where children and youth were placed, inaccuracies in birthdates). The quality of the list of children and youth had, however, improved since the first versions generated by the department in early 2024. Implementation and consistent use of Matrix will make the process of monitoring and reporting on children and youth under the department’s care more efficient. In the meantime, maintaining the list will depend on manual updates that perpetuate the risk of inaccuracies and inconsistencies such as those that we identified ([Exhibit 5](#)).

**Exhibit 5—A new information system for managing case files was implemented but not used by all staff**

What we looked for	Actions taken by the department	Assessment of progress
<p>The Department of Family Services implemented and used the Matrix information system to access data on children and youth under its care or receiving supports from the department, both inside and outside of Nunavut.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The department launched a new information management system—Matrix—at the end of November 2023. The system was not yet being used by all community social services workers (CSSWs) and other staff despite being functional. The department was able to generate reports on the number of staff who logged in to the system but not the number of staff who were using the system to manage case files.</li> <li>• The department made case documentation stored on the department’s shared drive accessible through the Matrix system in fall 2024. The department had not transferred case documentation into Matrix that had been stored on USB keys or in paper files.</li> <li>• The department offered new training for staff on Matrix and published a directive that all staff be using Matrix by the end of March 2025. As of 31 October 2024, 57 staff out of a total of 141 Family Wellness staff had completed the revised Matrix training, including 30 CSSWs. Another 16 staff were in the process of completing the training.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"> Actions taken— some progress</p>

What we looked for	Actions taken by the department	Assessment of progress
<p>The Department of Family Services has complete, accurate, and up-to-date data on the number of children and youth under its care or receiving supports from the department, both inside and outside of Nunavut.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not all staff used Matrix to record and manage information. Accordingly, as an interim measure, the department manually collected information on children and youth from CSSWs in each region of Nunavut.</li> <li>• The department conducted validation work with care providers and child welfare agencies, including for individuals placed outside of Nunavut. Meetings took place between Family Wellness division staff at headquarters and in Nunavut regions and information was received from regional staff to update information and check the completeness and accuracy of the list of children and youth.</li> <li>• As a result, the department had a more complete and up-to-date list of children and youth compared with what was in place during our 2023 audit.</li> <li>• We found that there were inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the latest version of the department's list that we examined (for example, inconsistent information regarding where children and youth were placed, inaccuracies in birthdates). The quality of the list of children and youth did, however, improve since the first versions generated by the department in early 2024.</li> <li>• As part of the new standards and procedures for out-of-territory placements, CSSWs were required to give the department's interjurisdictional placement specialist prior notice of any placements of children or youth outside of Nunavut. This is intended to help keep the list of the number of children and youth placed outside of the territory, and their placement details, accurate and up to date.</li> </ul>	<p> Actions taken—some progress</p>

**Legend—Assessment of progress**

-  No actions taken—no progress
-  Some actions taken—progress enabled
-  Actions taken—some progress
-  Significant actions taken—substantial progress and improved outcomes

## The Department of Family Services took actions to better support the health, safety, and well-being of employees

### Context

22. In 2023, we issued a letter to senior management of the Department of Family Services in which we raised concerns over how the department managed the health and safety of its employees. We noted that the department had neither a health and safety program nor


a workplace violence policy. We also noted that the department did not have a system in place to collect and manage occupational health and safety incident reports.

## Counselling services provided to Family Wellness staff





### Findings

23. During the work conducted for this audit, we found that the Department of Family Services had taken actions to improve how it supports the health, safety, and well-being of its employees ([Exhibit 6](#)).

### Exhibit 6—Actions were taken to support the health, safety, and well-being of employees

What we looked for	Actions taken by the department	Assessment of progress
<p>The Department of Family Services improved its support to the health and safety of employees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To better support the safety and well-being of employees, counselling services for the Family Wellness division staff were provided starting in October 2023. This included one-on-one and group counselling sessions and crisis debrief sessions. Monthly and weekly wellness check-ins were also provided to frontline staff. The counselling service provider reported receiving positive feedback from departmental staff.</li> <li>• A new occupational health and safety framework, workplace violence policy, and working alone policy were under development and were in draft form as of 31 October 2024.</li> <li>• The department created new positions for a health and safety coordinator and a critical incident debriefing coordinator. Their responsibilities would include tracking and centralizing incidents reported by employees. The staffing processes for these positions were ongoing, and these positions had not been filled as of 31 October 2024.</li> <li>• Between January and August 2024, the department consulted Family Wellness division employees from across the territory to better understand workplace dynamics, such as working conditions, morale, and workload. Numerous concerns were raised by employees, including lack of clinical supervision of case management. Concerns were also raised regarding disrespect in the workplace. In response, the department took some disciplinary actions and planned to provide respectful workplace training in early 2025.</li> </ul>	 <p>Actions taken—some progress</p>

#### Legend—Assessment of progress

-  No actions taken—no progress
-  Some actions taken—progress enabled
-  Actions taken—some progress
-  Significant actions taken—substantial progress and improved outcomes

## The Department of Family Services prepared a strategic action plan, but it was missing many essential elements

---

### Context

24. In response to our 2023 audit report, in fall 2023, the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts recommended that the Department of Family Services present a strategic plan to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut, no later than the winter sitting of 2024 (February 22 to March 12). The committee further recommended that the plan contain clear and concise commitments with measurable outcomes, or targets, and specific timelines and accountabilities and that a comprehensive evaluation framework be established and included in the plan.

### Strategic action plan lacked key elements for accountability

---

### Findings

25. In February 2024, the Department of Family Services tabled the Department of Family Services Ilagiitsiarniq Family Wellness Strategic Framework 2023-2028 in the Legislative Assembly. This contained a draft action plan. In May 2024, the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts further recommended that the Department of Family Services finalize its strategic action plan without any further delay. The strategic framework and draft action plan formed the basis of consultations that took place across Nunavut during summer 2024. In October 2024, the Department of Family Services tabled its final Family Wellness Ilagiitsiarniq Strategic Action Plan 2023-2028 in the Legislative Assembly.

26. We found that the strategic action plan did not include essential elements that the committee had recommended:

- The plan included 80 actions under 7 priority areas to address the long-standing issues regarding supports provided to vulnerable children and youth and their families, including those raised in our past audits. The department planned to implement its actions in the short term (within 1 year), medium term (between 2 to 3 years), and long term (in 3 or more years). We noted that the department had not prioritized its actions. The plan is not clear as to the starting point of these timelines, which is important for being able to measure progress and to determine whether progress is on track; however, the department informed us that it was using November 2023 as a starting point.

- The plan contained actions to be taken and related indicators. However, it lacked targets and baselines needed to measure progress, specific timelines, and clear accountabilities. The plan presented key components of what would be in an evaluation framework, such as developing key performance indicators and conducting regular audits of services to ensure compliance with the department's standards and procedures. The plan noted that work on refining measurement tools will continue.

27. We found that the department was implementing several commitments outlined in the final plan, prior to the plan being finalized. This included, for example, reviewing and updating case management standards, training staff to use the department's new information system (Matrix), implementing continuous training, and recruiting a territorial quality assurance manager.

## Conclusion

28. We concluded that the Department of Family Services had not made progress toward improving services to protect and support the well-being of vulnerable children and youth and their families in accordance with legislation, policy, and program requirements. However, the department had undertaken initial actions in areas such as service capacity, training, and information management. Most of the work being undertaken by the department was in the early stages, and substantial work remained to be done to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and youth.

## About the Audit

This independent assurance report was prepared by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada on child and family services in Nunavut. Our responsibility was to provide objective information, advice, and assurance to assist the Legislative Assembly in its scrutiny of the government's management of resources and programs and to conclude on whether the Department of Family Services had made progress in improving its management of services to protect and support the well-being of vulnerable children and youth and their families and complied in all significant respects with the applicable criteria.

All work in this audit was performed to a reasonable level of assurance in accordance with the Canadian Standard on Assurance Engagements (CSAE) 3001—Direct Engagements, set out by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada (CPA Canada) in the CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance.

The Office of the Auditor General of Canada applies the Canadian Standard on Quality Management 1—Quality Management for Firms That Perform Audits or Reviews of Financial Statements, or Other Assurance or Related Services Engagements. This standard requires our office to design, implement, and operate a system of quality management, including policies or procedures regarding compliance with ethical requirements, professional standards, and applicable legal and regulatory requirements.

In conducting the audit work, we complied with the independence and other ethical requirements of the relevant rules of professional conduct applicable to the practice of public accounting in Canada, which are founded on fundamental principles of integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality, and professional behaviour.

In accordance with our regular audit process, we obtained the following from entity management:

- confirmation of management's responsibility for the subject under audit
- acknowledgement of the suitability of the criteria used in the audit
- confirmation that all known information that has been requested, or that could affect the findings or audit conclusion, has been provided
- confirmation that the audit report is factually accurate

### Audit objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether the Department of Family Services had made progress in improving services to protect and support the well-being of vulnerable children and youth and their families in accordance with legislation, policy, and program requirements.

### Scope and approach

The approach taken to obtain reasonable assurance to support our conclusion relied on documentary evidence and interviews with officials from the Department of Family Services. We also collected evidence on whether progress had been made to address the root causes of

the deficiencies noted in our May 2023 report in order to improve the services provided by the department to children and families in need of support. This included staffing information from the Government of Nunavut's establishment reports. We did not audit the figures in these reports.

Given that case files for children and youth were still being migrated to the Department of Family Services' information system, and that efforts were ongoing to improve case management, we did not examine individual case files to assess whether there had been progress in terms of improving compliance against the department's case management standards.

## Criteria

We used the following criteria to conclude against our audit objective:

Criteria	Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Department of Family Services started implementing its strategic action plan.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services improved its response to reports of child abuse, harm, and neglect toward meeting Family Wellness standards requirements.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services is better meeting the needs of children and their families in accordance with Family Wellness standards.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services improved how it conducts reviews and visits of children and their foster families toward meeting its standards and procedures.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services improved its case management of Nunavut child and youth who were out of the territory, maintained their connection to their family, and ensured that they receive culturally appropriate services.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services improved its monitoring of out-of-territory residential care facilities (for compliance with safety, licensing, and service contract requirements).</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services improved the supervision and support to community social services workers to perform their duties.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services analyzed service needs and improved frontline service capacity consistent with those needs.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services filled a significant portion of community social services worker positions with permanent employees in all communities and addressed systemic retention issues.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services has increased the number of Inuit in its workforce (frontline social work positions) in line with its Inuit Employment Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Child and Family Services Act</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Child and Family Services Regulations</a></li> <li>• Children and Family Services Standards and Procedures Manual, Department of Family Services, 2018</li> <li>• Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations</li> <li>• Business Plan, Government of Nunavut &amp; Territorial Corporations, 2024–2026, Government of Nunavut</li> <li>• Turaaqtavut, Government of Nunavut, 5th Legislative Assembly, 2018</li> <li>• Provincial/Territorial Protocol on Children, Youth and Families Moving Between Provinces and Territories, 2016</li> <li>• Contract Procedure (Regions), Department of Family Services</li> <li>• Residential Care Facility Standards, Department of Family Services, 2010</li> <li>• <a href="#">Safety Act</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Occupational Health and Safety Regulations</a></li> <li>• Human Resources Manual, Government of Nunavut, 2006 (and subsequent revision)</li> <li>• Records Management Policy, Government of Nunavut</li> <li>• Inuit Employment Plan 2017 to 2023 (and subsequent revision), Department of Family Services</li> <li>• Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, Article 23</li> </ul>



Criteria	Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Department of Family Services provided training on departmental standards and procedures for child protection, as well as orientation and onboarding on Inuit culture, to a significant portion of community social services workers.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services has complete, accurate, and up-to-date data on the number of children and youth under its care or receiving supports from the department, both inside and outside of Nunavut.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services implemented and used the Matrix information system to access data on children and youth under its care or receiving supports from the department, both inside and outside of Nunavut.</li> <li>• The Department of Family Services improved its support to the health and safety of employees.</li> </ul>	

### Period covered by the audit

The audit covered the period from 31 May 2023 to 31 October 2024. This is the period to which the audit conclusion applies.

### Date of the report

We obtained sufficient and appropriate audit evidence on which to base our conclusion on 7 February 2025, in Ottawa, Canada.

### Audit team

This audit was completed by a multidisciplinary team from across the Office of the Auditor General of Canada led by James McKenzie, Principal. The principal has overall responsibility for audit quality, including conducting the audit in accordance with professional standards, applicable legal and regulatory requirements, and the office's policies and system of quality management.

