

2025-2026

Annual Report

Social Supports
and Well-Being





MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

As Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, I am pleased to present the department's 2025-26 Annual Report, which covers the period of April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026.

Over the past year, the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being has worked to create an inclusive and accessible province that supports the well-being of individuals, children, youth, and families. The department continued its commitment to prevention, early intervention, and protection to ensure that all individuals in the province are supported to thrive. This includes reducing poverty; improving affordability; advancing accessibility within communities; ensuring the protection and well-being of children and youth; and collaborating with Indigenous Governments and Organizations to deliver services to Indigenous children, youth, and families.

A new Healthy Communities Branch was also added to the department in 2025. This branch focuses on improving quality of life by reducing poverty and strengthening the conditions that influence health and well being through coordinated, preventive, and community-focused approaches.

This report demonstrates the department's progress on the goals and objectives set out in the 2025-26 Strategic Plan. I am proud of our accomplishments and would like to acknowledge our community partners and individuals with lived experience, whose perspectives have informed our work and supported the achievement of our objectives.

This report was prepared in accordance with the requirements for a category 1 entity under the **Transparency and Accountability Act**. As Minister, I am accountable for the results contained in this report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Tibbs'.

Hon. Chris Tibbs
Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being
Minister of Poverty Reduction
Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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Departmental Overview

Organizational Structure

The Department of Social Supports and Well-Being (SSWB) is a category 1 Provincial Government entity under the **Transparency and Accountability Act**, focused on supporting individuals, families and communities in Newfoundland and Labrador in achieving improved social well-being and reduced poverty.

For detailed information related to SSWB's vision, mandate, roles and responsibilities, and lines of business, please refer to the department's [2026-29 Strategic Plan](#), which can be found at www.gov.nl.ca/sswb/files/SSWBStrategicPlan-2026-2029.pdf.

Staff and Budget

Branch	# of Employees	Budget
Minister's Office and Executive Support	17	\$1,488,000
Corporate Services and Performance Improvement	109	\$7,269,000
Child and Youth Services	692	\$145,530,900
Policy and Programs	29	\$11,294,900
Prevention and Early Intervention	219	\$265,029,500
Healthy Communities ¹	10	\$4,711,900

¹On October 29, 2025, a new Healthy Communities Branch was created within SSWB.

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As of March 31, 2026, SSWB had 1076 positions - 909 permanent, 142 temporary and 25 contractual. The provincial office, located in St. John's, had 192 positions. Below is a breakdown of the number of employees per region and office locations for the Child and Youth Services Branch and the Income Support Service Delivery Division, within the Prevention and Early Intervention Branch.

Branch/Division	Region	Positions	Office Locations
Child and Youth Services	Central-West	257	• Baie Verte • Bonavista • Botwood • Channel-Port-aux-Basques • Clareville • Conne River • Corner Brook • Deer Lake • Gander • Grand Falls-Windsor • Harbour Breton • Holyrood • Lewisporte • Marystown • Musgrave Harbour • Placentia • Roddickton • Springdale • St. Alban's • St. Anthony • Stephenville • Summerford • Whitbourne

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	Labrador	124	• Cartwright • Forteau • Happy Valley-Goose Bay • Hopedale • Labrador City • Makkovik • Nain • Natuashish • Rigolet • Sheshatshiu
	Metro	292	• Bay Roberts • Bell Island • Conception Bay South • Ferryland • Harbour Grace • Mount Pearl • St. John's
Income Support Service Delivery	Province- wide	211	• Carbonear • Channel-Port-aux-Basques • Clarenville • Corner Brook • Gander • Grand Falls-Windsor • Happy Valley-Goose Bay • Marystown • St. John's • Stephenville

In 2025-26, SSWB had total expenditures of \$450,676,366 for the 2025-26 fiscal year. Additional information is included in the Financial Information section.

Additional information about the department can be found at: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/sswb/>

Highlights and Partnerships

Highlights

Provincial Child Benefit and Nutrition Benefit Payments: The Provincial Government announced the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit, and the Early Childhood component of the Prenatal-Early Childhood Nutrition Supplement, in June 2025. The Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit is a tax-free amount ranging from \$152 – \$186 per month per child under 18 years of age, depending on family size and income, to help low-income families with the cost of raising children. The Early Childhood component of the Prenatal-Early Childhood Nutrition Supplement is an additional benefit of \$150 per month per child for eligible families with children under the age of five to help with the cost of nutritious food. Both benefits are provided to low-income families by the Provincial Government in a single monthly payment.

Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit Payments: The Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit (NLDB) provides up to \$400 per month for eligible individuals with disabilities. NLDB payments began in July 2025. NLDB payments are considered exempt income under the Income Support program, meaning receiving the NLDB will not impact a person's Income Support benefits. Approximately 10,000 individuals in the province receive the monthly benefit.

Back-to-School Benefit: Payments for the new Back-to-School Benefit were distributed in August 2025. The Back-to-School Benefit provides \$100 per school-aged child for an eligible family receiving Income Support and is issued automatically once per year. The new initiative helps low-income families with the cost of school supplies. More than 3,400

households, and nearly 5,500 school-aged children and youth, are benefiting from this affordability initiative.

Action Plan in Response to Child and Youth Advocate Report: In response to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate's Special Report released in December 2025, SSWB released an Action Plan in January 2026. The plan will ensure better protection of children and youth in SSWB's care and will strengthen how SSWB, and its partners, respond when concerns are raised. Key items within the Action Plan include an independent examination and improvement of police policies, procedures, and response related to allegations that a child or youth has been sexually abused or exploited; completion of the ongoing review of the **Children, Youth and Families Act** to further protect and ensure the safety of children and youth in care from potential abuse or exploitation; re-establishment of the Child and Youth Advocacy Centre as a central access point for child victims and their families to receive trauma-informed services and resources (a Steering Committee has been established to guide implementation); and finalization of updated Memorandums of Understanding with the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Development of New Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy: Work began in March 2026 to advance a new 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy, focused on practical, forward-looking solutions to help reduce poverty rates to the lowest in Canada by 2036. A ministerial committee has been created, as well as a new Healthy Communities branch. This branch will bring focus to this important work and is dedicated to poverty reduction, prevention, and the linkages between poverty, well-being, and the social determinants of health.

Progress on Establishment of a Disability Advocate: Engagement with the disability community in 2025-26 helped inform the creation of a Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Advocate. The disability community provided feedback on how the role, mandate, and structure of an Office of the Disability Advocate should be tailored to uniquely suit the needs of persons with disabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador. This

work led to Bill 1, the **Disability Advocate Act**, which advanced through third reading in the House of Assembly in March 2026.

Partnerships

Collaboration with Provincial Government Departments: In 2025-26, SSWB collaborated with other departments, Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, and the Conseil scolaire francophone provincial to develop a new community health model for delivering services across departments and agencies. This model includes a central intake process that streamlines pathways, making it easier for parents, caregivers, educators, and health professionals to access appropriate programs and services for children and youth. In March 2026, SSWB also created a ministerial committee to inform the development of a new Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy. The committee includes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being and Minister of Housing, as Chair; the Minister of Health and Community Services; Minister for Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and the Minister of Labrador Affairs; the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development; the Minister of Jobs, Growth and Rural Development; the Minister of Finance and Minister of Seniors; and the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Federal/Provincial/Territorial Collaboration: During 2025-26, SSWB continued to work with federal and provincial counterparts to discuss new and emerging issues and work collaboratively on key issues, including those related to child welfare; disability supports; income support; Indigenous children and youth in care; youth corrections; and poverty. The Atlantic Ministers Responsible for Social Services, a forum for Ministers from Atlantic Canada, was re-established in 2025, further enhancing collaboration and information sharing between the Atlantic provinces.

Municipal/Community Collaboration: In April 2025, SSWB implemented two bus pass pilots in collaboration with the City of Corner Brook and St. Anthony Basin Resources Inc. (SABRI). These initiatives build on earlier collaboration with the City of St. John's to provide free bus passes to low-income individuals. Program funding supports the

provision of free monthly bus passes to eligible residents, including individuals receiving Income Support, youth accessing Youth Services, and seniors receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). Accessible and affordable transportation is essential to improving health and well-being. It enables individuals to attend appointments, participate in the workforce, access shopping, connect with family and friends, and engage in community life. Overall, the program supports greater choice, self-reliance, and independence.

Report on Performance

Issue One: Improved Delivery of Services to Children and Youth

Throughout 2025-26, SSWB focused on improving the delivery of services to children and youth. Recruitment and retention of frontline Child and Youth Services social workers have been a long-standing priority. The ability to deliver high-quality services and achieve better outcomes for the children, youth and families served depends on SSWB's ability to recruit and retain social workers and other professionals. Foster families, Kinship caregivers, and family-based carers provide nurturing, stable environments that promote emotional development, attachment, and well-being. SSWB improved outcomes for children and youth by recruiting, retaining and supporting social workers and foster families, helping children and youth in care find permanent homes, and providing a wide array of supportive services to address the increasing complexity of social and health-related issues facing children, youth and their families.

Goal

By March 31, 2026, SSWB will have improved delivery of services to children and youth.

2025-26 Objective

By March 31, 2026, SSWB will have implemented initiatives to improve the delivery of services for children and youth.

Indicator	Report on Performance
Implemented initiatives to support the recruitment and	In 2025-26, SSWB implemented recruitment and retention strategy initiatives, including:

retention of social workers.	• Recruitment and retention financial incentives, such as signing and retention bonuses, and enhanced Labrador benefits. Enhanced Labrador benefits include a travel bonus (with differing amounts based on location), SSWB- provided accommodations or a housing allowance, and a clothing allowance. • Exploring ways to improve the work environment, including implementing safety and wellness initiatives, strengthening managerial support and mentorship, enhancing communication and recognition, and fostering a more positive and respectful workplace culture that supports staff well-being and retention. • Approving 26 new temporary social worker assistant positions in 2025 to help improve service delivery and relieve workload pressures, particularly in areas of the province with social worker vacancies. • Establishing a provincial intake and after-hours model to deliver child and youth services. • Creating a travel team, made up of four social workers, to support work in communities with social worker vacancies. • Targeting recruitment of Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work graduates. In the spring of 2025, SSWB successfully recruited over half of the 91 Bachelor of Social Work students graduating from Memorial University of Newfoundland.
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Implemented case management technology improvements.	In 2025-26, SSWB implemented case management technology improvements as part of its recruitment and retention strategy. These improvements included: • A virtual visits protocol, developed in response to the recommendation to introduce virtual options for social worker visits from the Ernst and Young's (EY) report on the Child Welfare Service Delivery Model and Workload Review. This approach provides greater flexibility in contacting clients. • Mobile case management technologies, such as iPhones, provided to all Child and Youth Services social workers and social worker assistants.
Added Social Worker positions to further work related to adoptions.	In 2025-26, SSWB advanced adoptions work by recruiting four additional social workers dedicated to adoptions and implementing adoptions training for staff. The addition of these four positions creates a dedicated focus on adoptions work, ensuring timely completion of adoption profiles and assessments. These additional positions will increase adoption capacity, with the number of finalized adoptions expected to double in the next fiscal year.
Established a Foster Home Intake and Assessment Team.	In 2025-26, a provincial Foster Home Intake and Assessment Team was established. The team includes a clinical program supervisor, clerical support, an intake social worker, and six social workers across the province completing foster home assessments. Over the past year, this team has played a key role in addressing and reducing backlogged unprocessed files and has been successful in approving 11 new foster homes.

Goal Summary

Throughout the 2023-26 planning period, SSWB focused its efforts on recruiting and retaining social workers and improving case management.

Indicator	Report on Performance
Implemented recruitment and retention initiatives for social workers.	During the 2023-26 planning period, SSWB implemented a number of recruitment and retention initiatives for social workers. In addition to the initiatives noted above for 2025-26, the following outlines initiatives that were introduced in the first two years of the planning cycle. In 2023-24, SSWB: • Hired a Human Resource Strategist to develop a recruitment and retention plan for social workers. Efforts were focused in three primary areas: providing financial incentives, improving the work environment, and implementing operational efficiencies. • Implemented a signing and retention bonus to support recruitment and retention of Social Worker I and IIs working in frontline Child and Youth Services, including: - o A \$2900 one-time non-pensionable retention bonus for a one-year return-in-service agreement. - o A geographically based non-pensionable signing bonus for a two-year return-in-service agreement.

	• \$10,000 annually for positions on coastal Labrador; • \$8,000 annually for positions in Labrador Grenfell Health, excluding coastal Labrador; • \$7,000 annually for positions in communities off the Trans-Canada Highway, excluding the above, and; • \$5,000 annually for all other positions. In 2024-25, SSWB: • Implemented province-wide financial incentives for Social Workers and select Clinical Program Supervisors, including an enhanced benefits package in Labrador with housing allowance, travel bonus and clothing allowance. • Expanded support for social work services by adding Social Work Assistant positions and reviewing their role in enhancing service delivery. • Launched a pilot Clinical Practice Mentor role to leverage senior social workers' expertise to support junior social workers. • Initiated recruitment of a temporary travel team to address rural staffing shortages and a provincial foster home intake and assessment team to streamline recruitment and approvals. • Supported employee safety and well-being through a new Client and Site Assessment tool, and an SSWB Wellness Series delivered in partnership with the Public Service Commission.
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	Promoted opportunities through virtual career fairs, national outreach to Bachelor of Social Work students, targeted advertising with the Canadian Association of Social Workers, and ongoing collaboration with Memorial University to provide approximately 50 annual student placements. Overall, SSWB's recruitment and retention strategy efforts led to a 10 per cent increase in front-line social workers.
Implemented technology improvements for case management.	Over the goal period, SSWB implemented the following technology improvements: - Providing smart phones to all social work staff, allowing increased opportunities for client connection and creating case management efficiency through the ability for voice to text dictation. - Introducing a protocol to introduce virtual options for social worker visits, providing greater flexibility in contacting clients.

Issue Two: Improved Affordability

In 2025-26, government committed to developing a new 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy. This new strategy will replace previous poverty reduction efforts, including the Poverty Reduction Plan (2023-26). The new Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy will be focused on practical, forward-looking solutions to help reduce poverty rates to the lowest in Canada by 2036. The new Healthy Communities branch will bring focus to this work. This branch is dedicated to poverty reduction, prevention, and the linkages between poverty, well-being, and the social determinants of health.

Over the past year, SSWB aimed to make life more affordable for people in this province by streamlining and improving access to benefits and financial supports through continued implementation of initiatives from the former Poverty Reduction Plan. These initiatives include increased child benefits for low-income families, improved housing support, increased monthly support and vision care access, and back-to-school supports.

Goal

By March 31, 2026, SSWB will have improved supports for low-income individuals and families.

2025-26 Objective

By March 31, 2026, SSWB will have identified areas to enhance the Income Support Program.

Indicator	Report on Performance
Completed review to streamline and improve the Income	In 2025-26, SSWB completed the review of the Income Support Program and implemented improvements designed to simplify the Income Support benefit structure,

Support benefit structure.	increased monthly support for those receiving the lowest benefits, and reduced barriers to financial assistance. Improvements to the Income Support program included: • Increased monthly support: Each eligible adult receives the same monthly individual benefit amount, regardless of living arrangements. This means that two adults living together receive \$561 per month each, rather than a reduced combined amount. • Improved housing support: All eligible one-adult households receive a maximum amount of \$522 per month and two eligible adults living together receive \$299 each (\$598 combined), regardless of their relationship to one another. • Increased the maximum security deposit contribution to \$522, with the clients first deposit no longer required to be repaid (i.e. not treated as an overpayment). • Introduced Back-to-school support: A new \$100 payment per school-aged child is issued each August to help with school-related expenses. • Improved vision care access: Enhanced benefits to cover the cost of a basic eye exam (up to \$100) and eyeglasses (\$290 for single vision and \$350 for bifocals).
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Goal Summary

Throughout the 2023-26 planning period, SSWB focused its efforts on improving affordability by streamlining access to benefits and financial supports.

Indicator	Report on Performance
Reviewed the Income Support Program to further streamline benefits.	The review of the Income Support Program began in 2022. In addition to the changes made in 2025-26, SSWB also implemented changes to the Income Support benefit structure in 2024-25. These enhancements streamlined the benefit structure, simplified the program, increased the lowest rates, removed requirements for medical notes, and improved incentives for people to share accommodations. Overall, the changes implemented reduced the total number of basic monthly benefits from 30 to 17. Changes included: • Consolidating two separate board and lodging rates, per household type, into one rate. The higher benefit amount is now the same for people who are boarding with either relatives or non-relatives. • Providing all single people in receipt of Income Support under age 30 the same higher basic benefit rates as recipients in other age groups. • Implementing a \$105 per month Seniors Supplement that replaces and expands the Income Support program's previous supplement to support people over age 65 who are not eligible for Federal Seniors Benefits, mainly new Canadians. • Allowing a person in receipt of Income Support to keep their full benefits if they have a boarder living with them, which expands housing options. • Streamlining and enhancing Income Support funeral and burial rates and rate structure by consolidating 19 rates into four and significantly improving benefits amounts.

Opportunities and Challenges

In 2025-26, SSWB delivered programs and services that supported children and youth who had experienced abuse or neglect, advanced accessibility and social well-being, and helped reduce poverty for individuals, families, and communities throughout the province. In carrying out this work, the department identified the following opportunities and challenges:

- Recruitment and retention of frontline Child and Youth Services social workers, particularly in rural and remote communities, remains a significant challenge. The department will continue to explore and implement recruitment and retention strategies, while strengthening relationships with community partners and Indigenous Governments and Organizations to support service delivery and improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.
- Rising living costs continue to place pressure on low-income individuals and families. Opportunities exist to improve affordability through enhanced benefits and targeted financial supports, including delivery of the Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit (NLDB) and increasing the eligibility and amount for the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit.
- Affordable housing shortages across the province increase the risk of housing instability, shelter use, and homelessness among vulnerable individuals and families. The department will continue to work with government entities, such as the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, to better coordinate supports and services for those experiencing poverty and housing insecurity.
- The persistence of poverty and its impacts on individuals, families, and communities remains an ongoing challenge. The development of a new 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy presents an opportunity to work with community partners to establish shared priorities, strengthen coordinated action, and improve outcomes for people throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.
- A decline in the number of foster homes across the province has increased reliance on staffed residential living arrangements. To help address this challenge, SSWB has enhanced financial support for foster families and kinship care

providers. This is the first increase in foster family and kinship care provider rates since 2012.

- Many of the children, youth, and families SSWB serves have experienced trauma, and youth who grow up in care are at a higher risk of experiencing negative outcomes. In response, the department has an opportunity to improve outcomes for children and youth in care by expanding adoption efforts to help more children find permanent homes, including a goal of doubling the number of adoptions completed annually.

Financial Information

Expenditure and revenue figures included in this document are based on public information provided in the Report on the Program Expenditures and Revenues of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for Fiscal Year Ending 31 March 2026.

Branch	Actual (\$)	Estimates – Amended (\$)	Estimates – Original (\$)
Minister's Office	\$256,720	\$265,700	\$265,700
Executive Support	\$1,334,184	\$1,336,200	\$1,222,300
Corporate Services and Performance Improvement	\$6,306,471	\$6,690,700	\$7,269,000
Child and Youth Services	\$191,556,126	\$196,705,900	\$145,530,900
Disability Policy	\$1,298,668	\$1,344,500	\$1,343,500
Child Welfare Program and Policy	\$9,063,265	\$9,531,900	\$9,951,400
Income Support Regional Client Services	\$12,282,930	\$12,308,800	\$11,750,700
Income Support Program and Policy	\$224,433,869	\$223,791,300	\$253,278,800
Healthy Communities	\$4,144,134	\$4,211,900	\$4,711,900
Total (Department)	\$450,676,366	\$456,186,900	\$435,324,200

