



Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut—2014

Follow-up Report on Child and Family Services
in Nunavut—Department of Family Services



Office of the Auditor General of Canada
Bureau du vérificateur général du Canada

OAG-BVG



Auditor General of Canada
Vérificateur général du Canada

To the Honourable Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut:

I have the honour to transmit herewith my Follow-up Report on Child and Family Services in Nunavut—
Department of Family Services to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut in accordance with the provisions
of section 48 of the *Nunavut Act*.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Ferguson".

Michael Ferguson, CPA, CA
FCA (New Brunswick)

OTTAWA, 18 March 2014

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Follow-up Report on Child and Family Services in Nunavut—Department of Family Services

Main Points

What we examined

The Department of Family Services was established in April 2013 to provide a range of programs and services to support children, families, and other vulnerable members of the community. The Department consolidates programs and services from six government departments and agencies: Education, Economic Development and Transportation, Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, Nunavut Housing Corporation, Human Resources, and Health and Social Services.

In 2011 we reported that the Government of Nunavut was not adequately meeting its key responsibilities for the protection and well-being of children, youth, and their families. In this audit we examined whether the Government of Nunavut, through the Department of Family Services, is making satisfactory progress in addressing key recommendations from our 2011 audit report. Specifically, we looked at whether the Department has taken steps to strengthen and improve its ability to deliver services to children and their families.

Audit work for this report was completed on 1 December 2013. More details on the conduct of the audit are in **About the Audit** at the end of this report.

Why it's important

Children are among the most vulnerable people in society. The Government of Nunavut plays a key role in safeguarding the welfare of children at risk by protecting them from physical harm, neglect, and other forms of abuse, and by ensuring that their needs for shelter, food, and support are met. As a result, it must ensure that programs and services effectively serve those needs. As of April 2013, the Department had 395 children receiving services, including protective care, and it provided advice and counselling to many families seeking support.

What we found

- Overall, the Department of Family Services has made unsatisfactory progress in acting on commitments the government made in response to recommendations in our 2011 report. Despite its efforts, serious gaps remain in compliance with key child protection standards of the *Child and Family Services Act*.

For example, though visits with children have increased somewhat, less than a third of the children were visited at the frequency required according to standards. As a result, the children do not receive the level of attention that they are entitled to. The standards are intended to ensure that children are safe, and it is important that they be followed rigorously.

- The Department has been working to address staff shortages that affect its ability to identify children at risk and to investigate cases, as required by the *Child and Family Services Act*. The community social service worker and supervisor occupancy rate increased from 64 percent to 83 percent during the audit period. Sustained work is needed in this area, as ensuring ongoing capacity remains a challenge.
- The Department is still not consistently collecting the basic information it needs on children in care, as it does not receive timely information from many communities. For example, six communities provided fewer than 25 percent of their required reports, and of these, two submitted no reports during the audit period. The Department must closely monitor community reporting and take corrective follow-up action as required. Having this information is important to allow the Department to adequately plan for the needs of the children in its care.
- Parents are primarily responsible for a child's well-being, but communities also contribute to the child's protection. The Department has done little to act on the need for parental and community engagement and input that we identified in our 2011 audit report. Local input is a prerequisite to the effective development of these strategies.

The Department has responded. The Department agrees with all of the recommendations. Its detailed responses follow the recommendations throughout the report.

Introduction

1. Parents in Nunavut are primarily responsible for the protection and well-being of their children. The government steps in when children and youth are at risk of harm or when their physical and emotional needs are unmet. In some cases, the Government of Nunavut becomes the permanent guardian for the children in its care.
2. The *Child and Family Services Act* in Nunavut governs services for protecting children and youth. Nunavut's Department of Family Services is responsible for programs for children, youth, and their families. The Department's Children and Family Services Division has a 2013–14 fiscal year budget of \$50.3 million, of which \$10 million is allocated for child protection services.
3. The Minister of the Department of Family Services is responsible for ensuring compliance with the *Child and Family Services Act*. The Minister appoints the Director of Children and Family Services, whose responsibilities include
 - performing duties set out in the Act and ensuring that its requirements are carried out,
 - developing standards and procedures for applying the Act, and
 - appointing community social service workers to deliver child protection programs.
4. There were 55 positions for community social service workers and supervisors in the territory in July 2013. In addition to delivering the child protection programs, community social service workers and supervisors are responsible for programs that address issues such as adult services, family violence, adoption, and public guardianship.
5. As of April 2013, the Department had 395 children receiving services including protective care, and it provided advice and counselling to many families seeking support.

What we found in the 2011 audit

6. In March 2011, the Office of the Auditor General reported on programs and services for children, youth, and families in Nunavut. We concluded that the Department of Health and Social Services, which was accountable for those services at the time, was not adequately fulfilling its key responsibilities for the protection and welfare of children. It did not meet many requirements of the *Child and Family Services Act* or its own standards and procedures.

7. In our report, we recommended that the Department of Health and Social Services should work to fulfill the Act's key requirements, such as ensuring adequate staffing, providing staff training, managing workloads, complying with standards, collecting and analyzing important information on children in its care, and engaging the community in its programs.

Events since the 2011 audit

8. At the time of our 2011 audit, the communities of Cape Dorset and Igloolik had contribution agreements to provide social services and child protection on behalf of the Government of Nunavut. Since then, the two communities formally transferred these responsibilities back to the territorial government. The rationale for the transfer was that the Government of Nunavut would provide more direct oversight of child welfare programs and services.

9. On 1 April 2013, the government established the Department of Family Services to consolidate child- and family-related programs and services from six government departments and agencies: Education; Economic Development and Transportation; Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs; Nunavut Housing Corporation; Human Resources; and Health and Social Services, which included the Children and Family Services Division. (To simplify departmental references in this report, we use "Department of Family Services" to mean the department that was responsible for the Children and Family Services Division during the follow-up audit period.)

10. The *Child and Family Services Act* was revised in 2013 to allow it to be interpreted according to Inuit societal values. Other changes in the Act included an updated protocol for the government's response when a child dies in its care and an expansion on the requirement to report a child in need of protection. The revised Act received royal assent in May 2013. In September 2013, the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* received royal assent. This Act establishes the appointment of an official representative to advocate for the rights and interests of children and youth.

11. Although these last two events are important to child and family services in general, they are too recent to have had an impact on our audit work.

Focus of the audit

12. Our 2011 audit covered children and family services, the Public Health Strategy, adoption, and coordination of child and family programs. We decided to follow up on children and family services after two years to see whether the Department of Health and Social Services had taken the initial steps needed to improve its delivery of services to children and their families. More specifically, we focused our attention on the following areas:

- filling vacant staff positions,
- training community social service workers,
- enforcing compliance with standards,
- gathering basic information on children in care, and
- engaging parents and communities to develop lasting solutions to systemic issues.

13. Our audit covered the period from March 2011 to August 2013. More details on the audit objective, scope, approach, and criteria are in **About the Audit** at the end of this report.

Observations and Recommendations

Workforce management

14. To fulfill its mandate, the Department of Family Services must be able to identify children at risk, investigate cases, and respond when children need protection. The number of community social service workers and supervisors must be adequate for carrying out these tasks. In addition, the Department must ensure that staff members have the training needed to perform their duties as set out in the *Child and Family Services Act*.

15. In this audit, we examined whether the Department of Family Services has adequate measures in place to address the vacancy and training issues we identified in our previous report. To assess the Department's progress against its commitments, we analyzed current and historical data on vacancies, staffing, and training. We also conducted interviews with key departmental officials, and with supervisors and social service workers in three communities.

The Department of Family Services has made progress in filling vacant positions but has not developed staffing strategies for the longer term

16. In the 2011 audit, we reported that the Department of Health and Social Services faced a serious gap in its program capacity because it was unable to fill positions for community social service workers or supervisors. We had found that, on a monthly average, over a third of the community social service worker and supervisor positions were filled by neither permanent nor casual employees. We had also noted that four communities were without a permanent community social service worker for more than a year.

17. In response to our recommendation for addressing these staffing issues, the Department of Health and Social Services committed to filling positions with casual staff on a short-term basis and hiring permanent employees in the longer term.

18. Since the 2011 audit, the Department of Family Services made progress in meeting its staffing commitment and made active use of hiring casual employees. In addition, the Department of Human Resources, which has since been merged into the Department of Finance, provided a staffing consultant on a one-time basis to oversee competitions for community social service workers.

19. These actions have contributed to positive results overall (Exhibit 1). We found that the occupancy rate for community social service workers and supervisors has increased from 64 percent to 83 percent during the audit period.

20. For the 2012–13 fiscal year, we noted that about half of the communities had a full or nearly full complement of community social service workers. Despite making some progress, a few communities

Exhibit 1 Occupancy rates for community social service workers and supervisors have increased

Types of positions	Percentage of positions filled			
	2011 Audit	2013 Audit		
	2009–10 fiscal year	2011–12 fiscal year	2012–13 fiscal year	2013–14 fiscal year (April–July 2013)
All positions	63%	64%	80%	83%
Permanent employees	Not reported	47%	63%	61%
Casual employees	Not reported	17%	17%	22%

encountered challenges in filling these positions. For example, in three communities, we found that the positions were filled for only one third or less of the fiscal year.

21. The Department of Family Services has made satisfactory progress in addressing our 2011 audit recommendation (Exhibit 2). In order to ensure that this progress is sustained, it now needs to turn its attention to developing staffing strategies for the longer term, which include planning, monitoring, and coordinating with the regions and the Department of Finance (which has government-wide responsibility for departmental staffing).

22. Ensuring ongoing capacity is necessary for the Department of Family Services if it is to deliver child protection programs and services as required by the *Child and Family Services Act*. Coordinated action within the Department and across the Government of Nunavut is necessary in order to plan, build, and sustain staffing levels over time.

Exhibit 2 Progress in addressing our recommendation on short-, medium-, and long-term strategies to fill community social service worker positions

Recommendation	Progress
<p>The Department of Health and Social Services, in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources, should develop short-, medium-, and long-term strategies to fill community social service workers positions in order to ensure that each community has adequate child and family services coverage.</p> <p>(Recommendation 27 of the 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut)</p>	<p>Satisfactory</p>

Satisfactory—Progress is satisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

Unsatisfactory—Progress is unsatisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

23. Recommendation. In keeping with its previous commitment, the Department of Family Services should build on its work to date and continue to collaborate with the Department of Finance and the regions to ensure that community social service worker positions are filled with permanent staff in all communities. In doing so, the Department of Family Services should monitor vacancies and staffing activity and should address any systemic recruitment and retention issues that affect its ability to sustain capacity.

The Department's response. Agreed. The Department will work with the appropriate government departments to address any barriers to recruitment and retention of community social service workers and supervisors.

In particular, these efforts will focus on ensuring that there is appropriate office space, that there are appropriate staff housing units, and that there are appropriate timelines associated with the staffing process.

The Department is working with Nunavut Arctic College to review the Human Services Program to ensure that the program results in graduates who are employable in positions with the Department.

In the short term, the Department will develop a system to monitor vacancies and staffing activity. This will help the Department to identify whether additional efforts are required to sustain capacity.

The Department of Family Services has analyzed workloads of community social service workers but has not set standards or monitored workloads on an ongoing basis

24. In our 2011 report, we identified workload as a major concern. Several community social service workers told us that because they often carried large workloads, they did not have the time they needed to provide as many services as they should. We found that the Department of Health and Social Services gathered little information on the workloads of its community social service workers and did not have guidelines for determining the appropriate number of cases per worker. We recommended that the Department perform a workload analysis, set workload standards, and take steps to ensure that these standards are met.

25. In our current audit, we found that the Department of Family Services met its commitment to perform a workload analysis. We also found that the Department has launched several initiatives to reduce workload, including the streamlining of child protection compliance standards and forms, and the specialization of roles in communities that have multiple social service workers. Although it is too early to assess results from these initiatives, the Department will need to evaluate the impact of workload changes over time.

26. Despite the Department's progress in workload analysis, we found that it did not use this analysis to set workload standards as we had recommended, nor did it monitor workloads on an ongoing basis (Exhibit 3). Without setting and monitoring standards, it would be difficult for the Department to assess, for example, the extent to which community social service workers would have time to focus on additional services, such as those aimed at prevention rather than intervention.

Exhibit 3 Progress in addressing our recommendation on performing workload analysis and setting workload standards

Recommendation	Progress
<p>The Department of Health and Social Services should perform an analysis of the workload of community social service workers. It should also set workload standards and take steps to ensure that these standards are met.</p> <p>(Recommendation 30 of the 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut)</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>

Satisfactory—Progress is satisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

Unsatisfactory—Progress is unsatisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

27. Recommendation. The Department of Family Services should set and monitor workload standards and take steps to ensure that these standards are met.

The Department's response. Agreed. Over the short term, the Department will continue its work to develop workload standards for both generic and specialized caseloads in keeping with recognized best practice standards (where available) and scope of practice within Nunavut.

This will entail a review of other provincial/territorial child welfare programs to determine current standards and other relevant professional bodies and associations regarding caseload standards for defined areas of practice.

The Department of Health and Social Services transferred correctional service responsibilities back to the Department of Justice

28. In the 2011 audit report, we expressed concern that community social service workers were required to provide correctional services in 14 communities. This additional role increased workloads, and it sometimes presented conflicts of interest when community social service workers were called on to serve both parents and children in protective care cases.

29. The Department committed to working with the Department of Justice on a three-year action plan to transfer back the responsibility for correctional services. We found that these functions were fully transferred to the Department of Justice in February 2013 (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4 Progress in addressing our recommendation on transferring correctional services to the Department of Justice

Recommendation	Progress
<p>The Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Justice should take steps so that the community social service workers no longer perform correctional services.</p> <p>(Recommendation 24 of the 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut)</p>	<p>Satisfactory</p>

Satisfactory—Progress is satisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

Unsatisfactory—Progress is unsatisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

The Department of Family Services has made adequate progress in addressing some training issues but has yet to track who received mandatory training

30. Mandatory training. In Nunavut, all community social service workers are required, according to standards, to complete mandatory training on the application of the *Child and Family Services Act* before obtaining a child protection worker appointment.

31. In our 2011 audit, we reported that the Department of Health and Social Services did not track whether community social service workers had received the mandatory training. Our analysis indicated that many workers had not received timely training or completed the mandatory program. We recommended that mandatory training be delivered to each community social service worker in a timely fashion before the worker obtained a child protection worker appointment.

32. In response to our recommendation in 2011 for mandatory training (Exhibit 5), the Department of Health and Social Services committed to developing mandatory training programs and delivering them to all new community social service workers on a schedule established by the Director of Children and Family Services. We assessed progress made on these commitments through a document review and interviews with key officials at headquarters and in the three communities we visited.

33. We found that the Department of Family Services has made adequate progress in the mandatory training of community social service workers. The Department has completed a needs assessment and redesigned the mandatory training program to respond to the issues identified. The new program is more practical and integrates content on Inuit societal values. It includes self-study materials as well

as mentoring and coaching by regional staff. The new training program was delivered as a pilot project to both permanent and casual community social service workers in September 2013. Management informed us that improvements need to be made on the Inuit societal values content for the next round of training.

34. Before the new program was put into place in 2013, the Department had continued to use the old course format for training delivered in 2011 and 2012. The Department provided us with the names of community social service workers who had completed the mandatory training and the names of those who were exempted from it. However, we could not assess, from these lists, whether the training was completed in a timely manner or if there were some community social service workers who still required training (Exhibit 5).

35. Recommendation. The Department of Family Services should track the community social service workers who receive or require mandatory training, and it should establish a regular training schedule to ensure that everyone who needs the training completes the program in a timely manner.

The Department's response. Agreed. The Department has worked on updating and improving its mandatory training program with the intention of offering it to all community social service workers as required.

Over the short term, the Department will improve its current tracking system of all community social service workers and their training to capture information such as dates of training completed and types of training completed. The tracking system will include a follow-up system to identify if an individual requires additional training.

Further, the Department will immediately establish a detailed learning plan process to ensure that all required competencies are met for community social service workers to receive a child protection worker appointment.

36. Supplemental training. In our 2011 audit, we also reported that the Department offered little supplemental training to community social service workers from various backgrounds. We emphasized the need for training on Inuit societal values to support social service workers in their interactions with the children, families, and communities of Nunavut. In response to our recommendation, the Department of Health and Social Services committed to providing community social service workers with supplemental training through teleconferences, workshops, and online initiatives.

37. To measure progress on these commitments, we reviewed documentation at headquarters and conducted interviews with key officials there and in the three communities we visited.

38. We found that the Department of Family Services has made adequate progress in meeting its commitments. The Department has developed and launched training initiatives, such as self-learning tools that include components on Inuit societal values. We also found that the Department has facilitated supplemental training sessions for community social service workers (for example, on responding to physical and sexual abuse) and has delivered some management training designed for supervisory staff.

Exhibit 5 Progress in addressing our recommendations on mandatory and supplemental training

Recommendation	Progress
<p>The Department of Health and Social Services should ensure that mandatory training is delivered to each community social service worker in a timely fashion before the worker obtains a Child Protection Worker Appointment.</p> <p>(Recommendation 35 of the 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut)</p>	<p>Satisfactory</p>
<p>The Department of Health and Social Services should provide supplemental training, including Inuit societal values training, that community social service workers require, based on the training needs and gaps identified in annual audits and appraisals.</p> <p>(Recommendation 36 of the 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut)</p>	<p>Satisfactory</p>

Satisfactory—Progress is satisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

Unsatisfactory—Progress is unsatisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

Compliance with key standards

39. Compliance with the requirements of the *Child and Family Services Act* is essential to ensure that children are protected from abuse, harm, and neglect and to help prevent future problems. Failure to comply with child protection requirements puts children at risk of possible physical or psychological harm.

40. The case file is a key tool for monitoring and managing a child’s and family’s situation. Community social service workers are required to maintain complete, accurate, and current documentation on each child and family they support. In addition, documentation of family history is critical in assessing risk and is particularly important in communities with high rates of employee turnover.

41. In 2011, we reported gaps in compliance with the standards for case management and documentation. We noted that only a few files of the children who were placed with extended family and non-family members showed that community social service workers had conducted criminal checks and a home study within the required timelines. The case files showed insufficient evidence that community social service workers had met with children or that supervisors reviewed cases. We also reported that the Department of Health and Social Services was unable to provide evidence of whether out-of-territory care facilities had current licences, which created a risk that children might be placed in a facility that did not meet their needs.

42. In its response to our recommendations, the Department of Health and Social Services committed to using various methods to address non-compliance with case management and documentation standards. These methods included communication activities and training, as well as case file audits by supervisors and independent annual case file audits by the Director of Children and Family Services. The annual case file audits were intended to identify areas for follow-up and corrective action.

43. In the current audit, we looked at whether the Department of Family Services has put adequate measures in place to address the non-compliance issues we identified in our 2011 audit report—namely, those involving standards for case management, facility licensing, and annual case reviews. We reviewed departmental documentation and interviewed key officials at headquarters to determine whether the Department had revised practices and processes and had improved compliance. We also reviewed 30 children’s case files to see whether they met the following departmental standards:

- **Incident response.** Community social service workers must assess (within 24 hours) and, if needed, investigate (within 72 hours, if the child was apprehended) all reports or referrals related to child protection concerns.
- **Visitation.** Depending on the child’s living arrangements, the community social service worker is required to meet privately with the child every four to six weeks and to maintain proper documentation of visits with the child and family.
- **Foster family safety check.** Criminal record checks and home studies must be completed as required when placing a child with extended family and non-family foster parents. Foster placements are to be reviewed annually.

- **Facility licensing and inspection.** Licensing and annual facility reviews are to be completed for group homes and out-of-territory care facilities.
- **Case plan reviews.** Supervisors are to review case plans every two months.

The Department of Family Services has made progress, but serious gaps remain in compliance with key child protection standards

44. We found that the Department of Family Services has taken some steps to address non-compliance with standards for facility inspections and case management, but it has not yet performed the Director's case file audits.

45. **Facilities inspections.** The Department of Family Services made progress in conducting annual inspections of out-of-territory facilities. We found that the Department completed 14 inspections of facilities for children and youth in 2012. Although no inspections of facilities had been completed in 2013 at the time of the follow-up audit, the Department of Family Services indicated that it planned to complete 16 inspections before the end of the fiscal year. In addition, the Department launched a new initiative in 2013 to centralize the care of children in out-of-territory residential facilities. We noted that annual inspections for two of the three Nunavut group homes for children and youth were completed in 2012.

46. **Case management standards.** The Department of Family Services reiterated the importance of compliance with standards through a directive and a staff teleconference. The Department also implemented a process for reviewing randomly selected case files to allow supervisors to identify and address compliance issues within the communities. Officials have continued the practice of sending key forms related to court documentation to headquarters for review of consistency and compliance. Such documents include investigation and apprehension reports. Despite these initiatives, we found that serious gaps remain in compliance with key child protection standards (Exhibit 6).

47. Although community social service workers continue to respond to incidents related to child protection in a timely manner, we still found that less than one third of the children receiving services in Nunavut were visited as required under the standards.

Exhibit 6 Case reviews show poor overall compliance with standards

Minimum standards requirements	Percentage of cases in full compliance with standard	
	2011 audit results	2013 audit results
Incident response		
Assessment in 24 hours	97% (59 of 61 sampled)	100% (19 of 19 sampled)
Investigation in 72 hours	97% (29 of 30 sampled)	100% (19 of 19 sampled)
Visitation		
Children in care in Nunavut	26% (16 of 61 sampled)	29% (8 of 28 sampled)
Children in out-of-territory facilities	29% (2 of 7 sampled)	100% (2 of 2 sampled)
Foster family safety checks and annual reviews		
Criminal check and home study for extended family foster homes	25% (4 of 16 sampled)	40% (8 of 20 sampled)
Criminal check and home study for non-family foster homes	32% (8 of 25 sampled)	60% (21 of 35 sampled)
Annual review of foster placements	Not reported	13% (4 of 32 sampled)
Case plan reviews		
Case plan review	0% (0 of 52 sampled)	21% (4 of 19 sampled)
Facility inspections		
Review of facility licences	25% (2 of 8 sampled)	29% (2 of 7 sampled)
Nunavut group home inspections	33% (1 of 3 in 2011)	67% (2 of 3 in 2012)

48. We also noted problems with file documentation. Children's case files and foster family files often included little information. In addition, the completeness of children's files varied, depending on the practices of individual community social service workers. Children's safety may be placed at risk whenever standards are not respected and documentation is insufficient.

49. **Director's annual audit.** Despite its commitment, the Department of Family Services did not perform annual audits. As part of its community visits, the Department did complete some case file analysis, which showed both non-compliance with standards and variations in records management. However, these community visit reports provided only high-level information on compliance deficiencies and did not include enough detail to help the community social service workers address specific non-compliance issues (Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7 Progress in addressing our recommendations on compliance with key child protection standards

Recommendation	Progress
<p>The Department of Health and Social Services should ensure that case management standards are met by having community social service workers meet with the children and their families and having supervisors review case plans as and when required.</p> <p>(Recommendation 44 of the 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut)</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>
<p>The Department of Health and Social Services should ensure that community social service workers and supervisors keep accurate records of visits to children under care and maintain complete documentation, as required by the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i>.</p> <p>(Recommendation 45 of the 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut)</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>
<p>When placing a child outside of the parental home for his or her safety and best interests, the Department of Health and Social Services should comply with its own directives and standards by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completing required safety checks such as a criminal record check, foster care home study, or group home evaluation; • ensuring that the facilities it deals with have a current license to operate; and • visiting children placed in facilities outside Nunavut, as required. <p>(Recommendation 53 of the 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut)</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>
<p>As per its standards and procedures, the Department of Health and Social Services should conduct annual audits of child protection files to verify that supervisors and community social service workers are fulfilling the requirements of the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i>. It should use the results to guide community social service workers' training.</p> <p>(Recommendation 55 of the 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut)</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>

Satisfactory—Progress is satisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

Unsatisfactory—Progress is unsatisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

50. Recommendation. The Department of Family Services should ensure compliance with standards established for case file management, facility inspections, foster home reviews, and the Director's annual audit. In doing so, it should

- ensure that staff, supervisors, and management are accountable for non-compliance with standards; and
- use the results of the existing control processes, such as case audits by supervisors, to take corrective action on deficiencies and to follow up on whether these deficiencies have been addressed.

The Department's response. Agreed. Over the short term, the Department will provide a case file standards training program for all supervisory staff, and revise the appropriate Children and Family Services Standards and Procedures Manual to ensure that non-compliance is addressed within the performance appraisal system.

The Department will establish a random file audit schedule to be implemented at both regional and headquarters offices in the medium term. The findings from these audits will be used to take corrective action in order to address non-compliance with standards.

Basic information on children in care

51. Community social service workers in each region are expected to collect basic information about the children in their care, such as age, date of birth, care agreement status (for example, plan of care or voluntary service agreement), foster placement, and whether the case file is open or closed. This data is gathered centrally and used to monitor the number of children receiving protective services. The information is important to allow the Department of Family Services to adequately plan for the needs of children in its care. It is also necessary for meeting the reporting requirements under the *Child and Family Services Act*.

52. In 2011, we found that as a result of incomplete reporting, headquarters staff did not know the status of children in its care. In response to our recommendation, the Department of Health and Social Services committed to holding regional directors and managers responsible for the accuracy of this monthly report and for submitting it to headquarters.

53. In the current audit, we examined whether the Department of Family Services has adequate mechanisms for addressing the weaknesses related to basic data collection that we identified in our previous report. As in the 2011 audit, we reviewed departmental documentation and tested monthly community reporting of basic

information on children in care. We looked at whether the Department has made adequate progress in collecting this information to improve program administration and performance.

The Department of Family Services has still not consistently collected basic information on children in care

54. In this audit, we found that although the Department of Family Services was able to provide us with more evidence of community reporting than in the previous audit, it was still unable to produce more than one quarter of the monthly reports that should have been submitted by communities between April 2011 and July 2013.

55. Our trend analysis indicated that some communities consistently met their reporting requirement, while others went months without submitting any information on the children in their care. For instance, 13 communities submitted more than 90 percent of their community reports, while 6 communities provided fewer than 25 percent of their required reports. Of these 6 communities, 2 submitted no reports during the audit period.

56. We found very limited evidence of follow-up by headquarters or the regions to address the missing reports. As a result of the lapses in reporting, the Department of Family Services could not confirm the accuracy of even the most basic information on children and youth in protective care (Exhibit 8). Having this kind of information allows the Department to gain a better understanding of the needs of children in its care and adjust its activities to provide appropriate support where needed.

Exhibit 8 Progress in addressing our recommendation on ensuring the collection of basic information on children in care

Recommendation	Progress
<p>The Department of Health and Social Services should ensure that the regions collect basic information about the children in care and send it to headquarters on a timely basis.</p> <p>(Recommendation 63 of the 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut)</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>

Satisfactory—Progress is satisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

Unsatisfactory—Progress is unsatisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

57. Recommendation. The Department of Family Services should ensure timely and consistent collection and sharing of basic information about the children in its care by closely monitoring community reporting and taking corrective follow-up action as required.

The Department's response. Agreed. Over the short term, the Department will ensure that all basic information about children in care is included in the headquarters tracking system being developed. Headquarters will actively follow up with regions that fail to report according to standards.

The Department will work to secure the resources to implement a client information system across Nunavut in the medium term.

Community engagement and input

58. In our 2011 audit, we reported that although the mandate of the Department of Health and Social Services was to protect children, it could not do this alone. Parents are primarily responsible for a child's well-being, but communities contribute to the child's protection. We stated that the Department needed to work closely with parents and communities to ensure that the needs of children for shelter, food, and support were met, and that they were protected from physical harm, neglect, and other forms of abuse. We recommended that the Department develop strategies and solutions that incorporate input from parents and communities. Local input is a prerequisite to the effective development of these strategies.

59. In response to our 2011 audit recommendations, the Department of Health and Social Services noted that it was undertaking a comprehensive review of the *Child and Family Services Act*. The Department stated that it was seeking direct feedback from Nunavummiut on how the Act should be changed to involve parents, families, and the community as a whole in keeping children safe. To obtain this feedback, the Department noted that it was making site visits and holding community stakeholder meetings and open community forums throughout the territory.

60. In this audit, we examined whether the Department has acted on the need for parental and community engagement and input identified in our 2011 report. We conducted interviews with key officials to see whether they had collected and used input from parents and communities to develop strategies incorporating community-based solutions.

The Department of Family Services has done little to engage parents and communities in child welfare strategy development

61. We found that the Department reached out to communities for input on the Social Services Review and developed the draft Social Services Transformation Plan 2012–2022, which calls for, among other things, mechanisms for ongoing involvement by parents and communities in the child welfare and social services systems.

62. However, the Department has done little to act on our recommendation (Exhibit 9). For example, the plan does not specify how this ongoing involvement will take place and does not define specific strategies with associated timelines and resource requirements.

Exhibit 9 Progress in addressing our recommendation on engaging parents and communities

Recommendation	Progress
The Department of Health and Social Services should engage parents and communities in a dialogue focused on keeping children safe. It should use their input to develop strategies that will incorporate community-based solutions. (Recommendation 67 of the 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut)	Unsatisfactory

Satisfactory—Progress is satisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

Unsatisfactory—Progress is unsatisfactory, given the significance and complexity of the issue, and the time that has elapsed since the recommendation was made.

63. **Recommendation.** As we recommended in our 2011 audit, the Department of Family Services should actively engage parents and communities in developing strategies for keeping children safe. These strategies should include specific actions, timelines, and resources to address challenges in their communities.

The Department’s response. Agreed. Over the short term, the Department will expand its regional reporting system to include information on services, activities, and resources to support child safety through parental engagement and community development.

In the medium term, the Department will review and expand the current training resources available to staff to promote parental engagement and community development work.

Conclusion

64. We concluded that the Department of Family Services has not made satisfactory progress in acting on the commitments it made in response to the observations and recommendations of our 2011 audit.

65. The Department has put adequate measures in place to address the vacancy and training issues we identified in our 2011 report. Given that many of the training initiatives have not yet been fully implemented and that staffing is an ongoing challenge, it will be important for the Department to sustain its efforts in this area.

66. Although the Department has put measures in place to address non-compliance with standards for case management and for facility inspections, serious gaps in key child protection standards compliance remain. In addressing these issues, the Department must ensure that its staff and management are held accountable for respecting the standards and procedures in the *Child and Family Services Act*.

67. The Department has not put adequate mechanisms in place to address the weaknesses related to collecting case information. In addition, the Department has done little to act on the need for parental and community input and engagement that we identified in our 2011 audit report.

About the Audit

The Office of the Auditor General’s responsibility was to conduct an independent examination of the Department of Family Services to provide objective information, advice, and assurance to assist the Legislative Assembly in its scrutiny of the Government of Nunavut’s management of resources and programs.

All of the audit work in this report was conducted in accordance with the standards for assurance engagements set out in the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada Handbook—Assurance. While the Office adopts these standards as the minimum requirement for our audits, we also draw upon the standards and practices of other disciplines.

As part of our regular audit process, we obtained management’s confirmation that the findings reported in this report are factually based.

Objective

The overall objective of this audit was to determine whether the Department of Family Services (formerly the Department of Health and Social Services) has made satisfactory progress in acting on key recommendations from our 2011 Report on Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut.

Specifically, we examined whether the Department has made adequate progress in the following areas:

- **Addressing workforce management.** Adequate progress would be demonstrated by the Department’s having delivered mandatory and supplemental training to staff and having taken measures that led to vacant positions being filled. These actions would be necessary in order to identify children at risk and investigate cases, as required by the *Child and Family Services Act*.
- **Monitoring compliance with the *Child and Family Services Act*.** Adequate progress would be indicated by the Department’s having taken measures that led to compliance with the standards for case management and facilities for children in care.
- **Collecting information to improve program administration and performance.** Adequate progress would be demonstrated by the Department’s having taken measures that led to improvements in the collection of basic information for children in care and to the gathering and greater use of input from the community in the development of child welfare strategies.

Scope and approach

In this audit, we followed up on departmental commitments made in response to our 2011 recommendations on staffing, training, workload management, collection of basic information, and engagement of the community.

To assess the Department’s progress against its commitments, we reviewed results from the previous audit, analyzed departmental documentation, and conducted interviews with key departmental officials as well as with supervisors and community social service workers in three communities (Pangnirtung, Cape Dorset, and Iqaluit). We analyzed vacancy, staffing, and training data and conducted a review of 30 children’s case files to

test whether the Department complied with key child protection standards. We also reviewed monthly community reports of basic information on children in care to determine whether they met the standards.

Criteria

Criteria	Sources
To determine whether the Department of Family Services (formerly the Department of Health and Social Services) has made satisfactory progress in addressing key recommendations from our 2011 audit report, we used the following criteria:	
<p>The Department has put adequate measures in place to address the vacancy issues identified in our 2011 audit report.</p> <p>The Department has put adequate measures in place to address the training issues identified in our 2011 audit report.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut (Recommendations 24, 27, 30, 35, and 36) • <i>Child and Family Services Act</i>, standards, and procedures manuals
<p>The Department has put adequate measures in place to address non-compliance with the case management standards identified in our 2011 audit report.</p> <p>The Department has adequate measures in place to address the non-compliance in facility licensing identified in our 2011 report.</p> <p>The Department has adequate mechanisms in place to address the non-compliance with standards for annual case reviews identified in our 2011 audit report.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut (Recommendations 44, 45, 53, and 55) • <i>Child and Family Services Act</i>, standards, and procedures manuals
<p>The Department has put adequate measures in place to address the weaknesses related to case information collection identified in our 2011 audit report.</p> <p>The Department has acted on the need for community engagement and involvement identified in our 2011 audit report.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2011 March Report of the Auditor General of Canada—Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut (Recommendations 63 and 67) • <i>Child and Family Services Act</i>, standards, and procedures manuals

Management reviewed and accepted the suitability of the criteria used in the audit.

Period covered by the audit

The audit covered the period between March 2011 and August 2013. Audit work for this report was completed on 1 December 2013.

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Appendix List of recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations found in the report. The number in front of the recommendation indicates the paragraph where it appears in the report. The numbers in parentheses indicate the paragraphs where the topic is discussed.

Recommendation	Response
Workforce management	
<p>23. In keeping with its previous commitment, the Department of Family Services should build on its work to date and continue to collaborate with the Department of Finance and the regions to ensure that community social service worker positions are filled with permanent staff in all communities. In doing so, the Department of Family Services should monitor vacancies and staffing activity and should address any systemic recruitment and retention issues that affect its ability to sustain capacity. (16–22)</p>	<p>The Department’s response. Agreed. The Department will work with the appropriate government departments to address any barriers to recruitment and retention of community social service workers and supervisors. In particular, these efforts will focus on ensuring that there is appropriate office space, that there are appropriate staff housing units, and that there are appropriate timelines associated with the staffing process.</p> <p>The Department is working with Nunavut Arctic College to review the Human Services Program to ensure that the program results in graduates who are employable in positions with the Department.</p> <p>In the short term, the Department will develop a system to monitor vacancies and staffing activity. This will help the Department to identify whether additional efforts are required to sustain capacity.</p>
<p>27. The Department of Family Services should set and monitor workload standards and take steps to ensure that these standards are met. (24–26)</p>	<p>The Department’s response. Agreed. Over the short term, the Department will continue its work to develop workload standards for both generic and specialized caseloads in keeping with recognized best practice standards (where available) and scope of practice within Nunavut.</p> <p>This will entail a review of other provincial/territorial child welfare programs to determine current standards and other relevant professional bodies and associations regarding caseload standards for defined areas of practice.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>35. The Department of Family Services should track the community social service workers who receive or require mandatory training, and it should establish a regular training schedule to ensure that everyone who needs the training completes the program in a timely manner. (30–34)</p>	<p>The Department’s response. Agreed. The Department has worked on updating and improving its mandatory training program with the intention of offering it to all community social service workers as required.</p> <p>Over the short term, the Department will improve its current tracking system of all community social service workers and their training to capture information such as dates of training completed and types of training completed. The tracking system will include a follow-up system to identify if an individual requires additional training.</p> <p>Further, the Department will immediately establish a detailed learning plan process to ensure that all required competencies are met for community social service workers to receive a child protection worker appointment.</p>
<hr/> <p>Compliance with key standards</p>	
<p>50. The Department of Family Services should ensure compliance with standards established for case file management, facility inspections, foster home reviews, and the Director’s annual audit. In doing so, it should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that staff, supervisors, and management are accountable for non-compliance with standards; and • use the results of the existing control processes, such as case audits by supervisors, to take corrective action on deficiencies and to follow up on whether these deficiencies have been addressed. (44–49) 	<p>The Department’s response. Agreed. Over the short term, the Department will provide a case file standards training program for all supervisory staff, and revise the appropriate Children and Family Services Standards and Procedures Manual to ensure that non-compliance is addressed within the performance appraisal system.</p> <p>The Department will establish a random file audit schedule to be implemented at both regional and headquarters offices in the medium term. The findings from these audits will be used to take corrective action in order to address non-compliance with standards.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Basic information on children in care</p> <p>57. The Department of Family Services should ensure timely and consistent collection and sharing of basic information about the children in its care by closely monitoring community reporting and taking corrective follow-up action as required. (54–56)</p>	<p>The Department’s response. Agreed. Over the short term, the Department will ensure that all basic information about children in care is included in the headquarters tracking system being developed. Headquarters will actively follow up with regions that fail to report according to standards.</p> <p>The Department will work to secure the resources to implement a client information system across Nunavut in the medium term.</p>
<p>Community engagement and input</p> <p>63. As we recommended in our 2011 audit, the Department of Family Services should actively engage parents and communities in developing strategies for keeping children safe. These strategies should include specific actions, timelines, and resources to address challenges in their communities. (61–62)</p>	<p>The Department’s response. Agreed. Over the short term, the Department will expand its regional reporting system to include information on services, activities, and resources to support child safety through parental engagement and community development.</p> <p>In the medium term, the Department will review and expand the current training resources available to staff to promote parental engagement and community development work.</p>