



Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts

***Report on the Review of the 2025 Report of the Auditor General of Canada
to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut: Follow-up on Child and Family
Services in Nunavut***

**2nd Session of the 6th Legislative Assembly of Nunavut
Spring 2025 Sitting**

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Introduction

The Office of the Auditor General of Canada's *2025 Follow Up Report on Child and Family Services in Nunavut Services* was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on March 5, 2025.

The Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts held a televised hearing on the Auditor General's 2025 Report on April 29 and 30, 2025. Transcripts from the hearing are available on the Legislative Assembly's website.

Witnesses appearing before the standing committee included senior officials from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada and the Government of Nunavut's departments of Family Services, Human Resources, Transportation and Infrastructure Nunavut, Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, as well as Nunavut Arctic College and the Nunavut Housing Corporation.

The Standing Committee extends its appreciation to the witnesses for their contributions to the proceedings.

The Auditor General's 2025 Report follows three previous reports by the Auditor General on this same subject, which were tabled in 2011, 2014 and 2023.

The first two reports from 2011 and 2014 contained a number of recommendations including the need to address staffing, training, compliance with standards, the collection of information and community and parental engagement.

The Auditor General of Canada's *2023 Report on Child and Family Services in Nunavut* again focused on the provision of services to protect and support the well-being of vulnerable children, youth and their families in accordance with legislation, policy and program requirements. The report did not contain any specific recommendations as it was determined that the recommendations from the first two reports had not been addressed.

The opening lines of the 2023 report stated:

"This audit report describes a crisis. It is a call for change. We are urging the Government of Nunavut to take immediate action to protect the vulnerable children and youth of the territory."

The 2023 report stressed that to resolve the ongoing failures would take a "whole-of-government" approach.

The Auditor General of Canada's *2025 Follow-up on Child and Family Services in Nunavut* is a "status update" on actions taken to address the findings in the Auditor General's three previous reports.

Rather than considering the 2025 report as a fourth audit on the same topic, the committee recognizes that it is the first in a series of monitoring audits by the Auditor General of Canada to ensure the Government of Nunavut's ongoing accountability for addressing the findings of its previous audits.

Whole-of-Government approach

One of the key findings in the Auditor General's *2023 Report on Child and Family Services in Nunavut* focused on 'root causes'. The report noted:

"We found that the Department of Family Services' inability to meet its responsibilities to Nunavut's at-risk children and youth is linked to many intertwined root causes that have contributed to this persistent and chronic crisis."

"These interlinked root causes will need to be addressed through interdepartmental collaboration. That will require the government to oversee a whole-of-government approach."

On May 30, the Premier issued a news release which stated:

"Our response must be swift. With the full support of Cabinet, the government is unlocking the resources necessary to enable the Departments of Family Services, Health, and Human Resources to respond financially and with increased human capacity. The Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs (EIA) will establish a Government of Nunavut (GN) audit and support function and develop a performance accountability framework. Taking a whole-of-government approach, EIA will provide oversight across departments for services related to the wellbeing of children, youth, and families."

During the hearing, when questioned on the government's progress this issue the Department Executive and Intergovernmental Services witness responded:

"So following the statement that was made, and as we looked to start this work and identifying the scope of responsibilities for this internal audit function, we found that there was a lot of alignment with an existing audit division within the Department of Finance. I alluded to that this morning, and that we continue to explore expanding the scope of responsibilities for Finance to potentially include some of the audit responsibilities linked to overall performance and accountability as referenced in this statement."

"With respect to the development of a performance accountability framework, I did mention this morning that this work has not begun. We are still determining, at least from the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, as it relates to this internal audit function. As soon as we are able to solidify the scope of responsibilities for what this will look like and where it will be housed, we will look to finalize an accountability framework."

A committee member noted that the "swift" response committed to by the Premier on May 30, 2023, "is now 23 months in the making."

Following its review of the Auditor General's 2023 Report which was tabled on November 1, 2023, the Standing Committee had recommended the following:

The standing committee recommends that the Government of Nunavut provide updates to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut on the status and progress of every specific task(s) assigned to each department which are directly linked to the root causes which affect the provision of services related to the wellbeing of children, youth and families in Nunavut.

The standing committee further recommends that these updates be tabled on the first day of every sitting of the Legislative Assembly on an ongoing basis.

The lack of action on the part of the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs has been noticeable with the absence of any such updates in response to the committee's recommendations.

The Standing Committee has noted, however, that the Department of Family Services has made considerable effort to collaborate with other departments to address a number of issues identified by the Auditor General which do not fall under the direct purview of Family Services. Input provided by witnesses from the departments of Human Resources, Transportation and Infrastructure Nunavut, Nunavut Arctic College and the Nunavut Housing Corporation further demonstrated significant effort on the part of those departments to support Family Services in addressing such underlying cross-government issues impacting the delivery of Family Wellness services as staff recruitment, training, housing, office space and providing various supports for staff.

However, the Standing Committee notes the ongoing lack of a dedicated whole-of-government approach to ensuring performance and accountability in addressing the ongoing and systemic issues which are impacting the delivery of services to Nunavut's most vulnerable children and youth.

During the hearing, the Deputy Auditor General noted:

"Just in terms of central oversight, one of the challenges with the government systems that we have in Canada and in the territory, in particular, is that accountability is assigned to particular portfolios or agencies. And while that is good from the perspective of being able to identify who should answer and inform the public about what's happening, sometimes it does lead to siloed thinking and this is a place where central agency leadership and oversight can help break down those barriers to improve services for the people of the territory."

The Standing Committee is of the view that that the Government of Nunavut's central agency, the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, has a key role to play in ensuring that the issues plaguing the delivery of child and family services are effectively addressed.

The Standing Committee recommends:

1. That the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs immediately establish a performance and accountability framework respecting the role and activities of each government department to address root causes impacting the provision of services related to the wellbeing of children, youth and families in Nunavut.

The Standing Committee further recommends:

2. That the performance and accountability framework established by the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs be tabled in the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut prior to the dissolution of this Assembly to serve as a guidepost to the Seventh Assembly of Nunavut.

Root Causes

The Auditor General's 2023 Report identified a number of underlying issues which impacted the Department of Family Services' ability to meet its responsibilities for Nunavut's children and youth including staffing, staff training, staff housing, and office space. The Auditor General's 2025 Follow-up Report audited causes of deficiency in the delivery of services for vulnerable children and youth.

While the report found that Family Services had successfully increased capacity in staffing many frontline service positions, it noted that the number of permanent Inuit community social services workers had not increased since 2023. The committee notes, however, that all Family Resource Worker positions are currently staffed by Inuit and commends the department on its efforts to ensure that its services are culturally relevant and responsive to the unique needs of Nunavummiut. The committee appreciated receiving additional information on the combined efforts of the Department of Family Services and Nunavut Arctic College to strengthen training and employment pathways for Inuit students and graduates of the College's Social Worker program. Supports are provided in the form of mentorships, supervised child protection work experience and targeted development opportunities.

Testimony from the witness representing Nunavut Arctic College provided an optimistic view with respect to the future recruitment and training of candidates into Nunavut's social work field.

“Now, what the college is doing itself to help bring more people through these important programs is the college is working to diversify its delivery model. So I believe it was in 2022-2023 the college received approved funding from this House to dedicate supports to put our social service worker program diploma into an online model. We’ve been doing that work, and from what I understand, we should have an online model completed by this summer. Rollout of that program may not happen until next year, just to make sure that we have all the support resources and everything ready, but the college hopes that in addition to our in-person delivery that an online delivery model will allow students who don’t wish to travel to take part in that. And it’s our hope that we’ll be able to catch more students and encourage them to take this program.”

The committee notes, however that a number of social worker positions remain unfilled. Casual staff and contracted staff currently provide services in a number of communities. Additional information provided by the Department of Family Services following the hearing indicated that 77 staff appointed under the *Child and Family Services Act* are working under letters of authority. Hiring staff remains a significant challenge for Family Services.

The witness for the Department of Human Resources described a number of initiatives to staff social worker positions:

“We have streamlined our staffing of these positions into one office as opposed to across four different offices, so we have one staffing consultant who’s responsible. e can do mass competitions that are open until filled so that we can continually assess, and candidates coming in as opposed to having set times where a competition is run. We are using LinkedIn and specific advertising on social work specific places.

Our salary review that we conducted last year with a 9 per cent increase actually positioned our social workers to some of the highest paid in the country, so that does impact our recruitment of positions. We have been supporting Family Services direct-appointing casual social workers into position and allowing them to stay in staff housing in transient housing, while we await staff housing units becoming available at the community level.”

The Standing Committee recommends:

3. That the Department of Family Services work with the Department of Human Resources to establish additional recruitment incentives for social work positions.

The Auditor General’s 2025 report demonstrated that such external factors as the lack of staff housing and the need for adequate office space also have a direct impact on staff recruitment and retention. Witnesses for the Nunavut Housing Corporation described a number of initiatives with respect to increasing staff housing options, however, given the competition for staff housing across all areas of government, it was unclear that any prioritization initiatives respecting Family Services staff are currently under consideration.

Additional information provided by the department following the hearing indicated that, despite the lack of staff housing being identified as a key factor impacting employment into the field, Family Services does not currently have any statistics on which of its employees occupy staff housing units and has difficulties in determining which vacant positions will require staff housing in the future.

The Standing Committee recommends:

4. That the Department of Family Services determines the current housing status of all Family Wellness employees and renew its efforts to work with the Nunavut Housing Corporation to address the availability of units to meet housing requirements for frontline staff as a priority.

The witness for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Nunavut described a number of initiatives currently underway to address Family Services office space needs:

“A really great first step that has been taken is identifying a position for a capital planner to do the assessment on space configurations.

Our role as a department is to manage the requests that come in from client departments, including Family Services, to make sure that the space is, firstly, available and, secondly, suitable for their programming needs. In the case of Family Services there’s been an extensive amount of work that has been happening over the last 12 to 18 months to advance their space needs as a highest priority, starting with reconfiguring spaces to make sure they are safe and functional, so minor upgrades like doors and access ways and to make sure that it is readily accessible by their clientele.”

The committee has noted a positive development in the number of recent requests for proposals to renovate such existing community infrastructure as portable classrooms and surplus buildings into Family Services office space.

The Auditor General’s 2025 Report acknowledged that the Department of Family Services has taken actions to better support the health, safety and well-being of its employees. The committee was pleased to note such departmental initiatives as the increase in supervision and mentoring activities, the provision of counselling for frontline workers, greater attention to workload allocation and ensuring access to respite and rest. Committee members remain concerned, however, about reports of threats to the safety and security of frontline staff.

The Standing Committee recommends:

5. That the Department of Family Services establish a framework to ensure that all health and safety incidents reported by employees can be tracked, reviewed and responded to in a timely manner.

Case Management

The Auditor General's 2025 Follow-up Report states that the Department of Family Services had improved its response to reports of child abuse, harm and neglect. While the Standing Committee appreciates that much work remains to be done to fully ensure that children and youth receive the protection they are entitled to and deserve, members recognize that significant efforts have been made over the past two years to address the findings in the Auditor General's earlier reports on Child and Family Services in Nunavut.

The committee anticipates that the department will soon be finalizing a number of standards and procedures in addition to the ones that have already been completed. Once the review of *Surusint Ikajuqtigiit, Nunavut's Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement*, is finalized, members hope to see improvements in responses to child abuse and neglect disclosures.

The committee was disappointed to learn that despite a number of training activities and directives to staff, the department's new Matrix case management system is still not fully implemented and operational. As the Deputy Auditor General and witnesses agreed, the collection, analysis and accuracy of data is critical to ensuring effective service delivery. During the hearing, members also explored a number of issues respecting information-sharing between government departments to address systemic issues as well as personal situations while ensuring that privacy considerations are taken into account.

Ilagiitsiarniq Family Wellness Strategic Action Plan

Following the Auditor General's 2023 *Report on Child and Family Wellness in Nunavut*, the Standing Committee's report on its review of the Auditor General's report included the following recommendations.

The standing committee recommends that the Department of Family Services' Strategic Plan in response to the Auditor General's report be provided to the Standing Committee at the earliest opportunity and tabled no later than the Winter sitting of 2024.

The standing committee further recommends that the commitments established in the Department of Family Services' Strategic Plan are clear and concise, that the expected results related to each of those commitments are straight-forward and measurable, and that each commitment and its expected results have specified timelines and accountabilities for achieving those timelines.

The standing committee further recommends that a comprehensive evaluation framework be established as a component of the Strategic Plan.

Since May of 2023, the Department of Family Services has introduced a Family Wellness Strategic Framework, a number of progress reports on the Framework and the *Ilagiitsiarniq Family Wellness Strategic Action Plan* which includes 80 actions under 7 priority areas. The Standing Committee notes that its recommendations following the Auditor General's 2023 report were not fully addressed.

This is also observed in the Auditor General's 2025 Follow-up Report:

"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."

"To focus its efforts and strengthen accountability, the department needs to prioritize actions with clear timelines for measuring progress."

At the start of the committee's hearing, the Deputy Auditor General stated:

"In October 2024, the department presented an 80-item strategic action plan to the Assembly outlining actions intended to enhance protection and support services for children, youth, and families. While the department's strategic action plan is far-reaching, it lacks targets and baselines, clear accountabilities, and specific timelines to measure progress. The department must prioritize its actions that will result in concrete outcomes."

During the hearing, the witness for the Department of Family Services responded to a question on which actions in the action plan they felt should be prioritized:

"I would tend to, in my personal and professional opinion, suggest that the biggest priority right now is compliance with standards to ensure better outcomes for people coming into contact with the child welfare system; recruitment and retention, and that includes ensuring adequate office space and housing is available. I would say probably those are my top two, and if I were going to go a little further, ensuring the appropriate implementation of the data management system so that we can properly assess the efficacy of the programs being delivered."

Members of the Standing Committee shared the concerns of the Auditor General that the *Ilagiitsiarniq Family Wellness Strategic Action Plan* was very broad in scope and lacked specific timelines, accountabilities and a means to track and measure progress. The committee recognizes that the Department of Family Services is committed to addressing all aspects of a system which is facing numerous challenges and deficiencies, however it is important that the immediate focus be on what can be realistically achieved with the resources that are currently allocated.

During the hearing, the witness for the Department of Family Services expressed their intent to table a revised and prioritized Action Plan during the spring sitting.

The Standing Committee recommends:

6. That the Department of Family Services bring forward a revised *Ilagiitsiarniq Family Wellness Strategic Action Plan* with targets, baselines, clear accountabilities and specific timelines and that actions be prioritized with a view to what can be realistically achieved within the timelines.

The Standing Committee further recommends:

7. That Family Services's revised *Ilagiitsiarniq Family Wellness Strategic Action Plan* be tabled in the House prior to the end of the term of the Sixth Assembly.

In conclusion, the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts thanks the witnesses at the hearing for their contributions in addressing issues raised in the Auditor General of Canada's 2025 Follow-up Report on Child and Family Services in Nunavut.

Committee members would further like to acknowledge Nunavut's front-line community social services workers and family resource workers, staff of the Family Wellness division of the Department of Family Services and, indeed, all members of the public service who work to ensure that Nunavut's children, youth and their families receive the support and services to which they are entitled.

The standing committee is requesting that a response to this report be provided to the committee pursuant to Rule 91(5) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut*.