

# Prevention Works: Local FCSS Advocacy Toolkit



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# Introduction

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) programs are on the frontline of community prevention in Alberta. They help people address challenges early, before they become crises that strain families, communities, and municipal resources. As demand and complexity continue to rise across the province, the role of FCSS has never been more important for Alberta.

In 2024, ABmunis members passed an advocacy resolution calling on the Government of Alberta to increase annual provincial funding for FCSS to \$161.5 million to match the level of population growth and inflation that has occurred since the last major funding increase in 2015.

This toolkit is designed to help local councils and administrations champion the importance of FCSS and advocate effectively for the provincial funding needed to sustain it. Inside, you'll find clear key messages, fact sheets, and engagement tools that make it easier to brief council, speak with MLAs, and communicate with your community.

## Use this toolkit to:

- Understand the current state of FCSS funding and why it's falling behind Alberta's growth.
- Share strong, consistent messages about the value of FCSS in preventing crises and reducing long-term system costs.
- Equip your council and administration with ready-to-use advocacy tools, talking points, and data.
- Highlight the real impact FCSS has in your community through local stories and examples.

FCSS matters because it keeps people connected, housed, and supported, reducing pressures on policing, health care, and emergency response. For municipalities already carrying more than their share of FCSS costs, advocating for proper provincial investment isn't just important, it's urgent.

Together, Alberta's municipalities can strengthen the case for long-term, sustainable FCSS funding and ensure communities have the preventive supports they need to thrive and succeed.

## **SECTION ONE**

# **THE CASE FOR FUNDING FCSS**

# The Case for Funding FCSS

## What is Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)

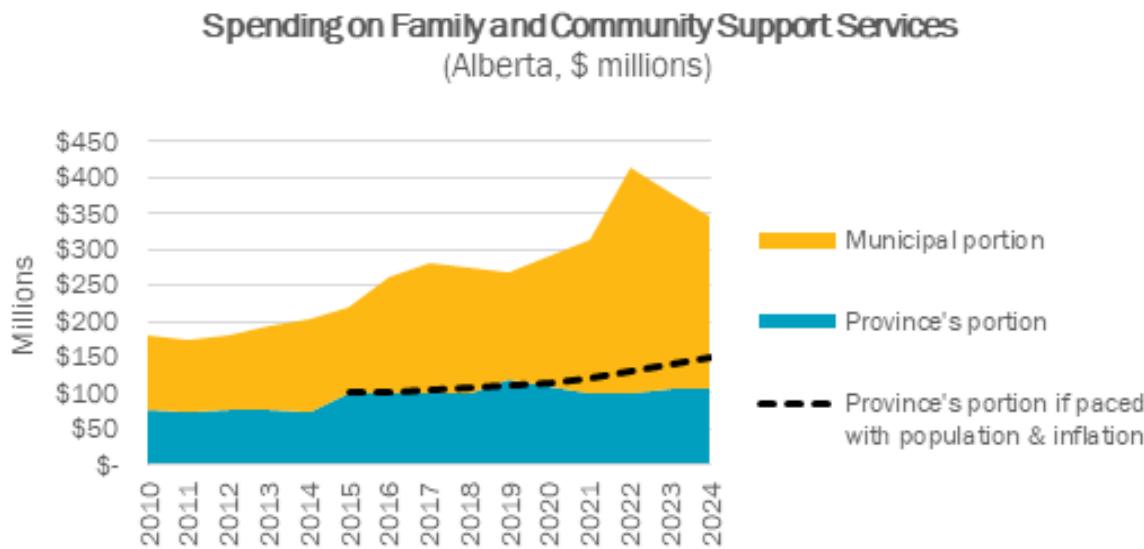
FCSS providers are a cornerstone of Alberta communities. Focusing on prevention, these programs help Albertans address health and social issues before they escalate into a crisis. FCSS is a uniquely Alberta program that works within a provincial priorities framework **and** enables local autonomy and decision-making about community services in over 300 municipalities and Metis settlements across the province. It is a cost-shared program with participating municipalities and Metis settlements contributing a minimum of 20% of the funds and the province funding up to 80%.

## Issue

Provincial funding for FCSS has largely stayed flat at \$100 million since 2015, with a \$5 million increase in 2023. Meanwhile, Alberta's population has grown by nearly 1 million, and inflation has averaged 2.25% annually. That's why provincial FCSS funding needs to be closer to \$162 million annually.

## Background

The gap between actual and needed funding has left municipalities scrambling to fill the void and many non-profit delivery beneficiaries receiving less. Municipalities almost doubled their 2015 spending in 2024, investing \$245 million in FCSS and wider community support programs. In doing so, they often exceed their required 20% commitment to FCSS grant eligible expenses. In rural Alberta, the situation is especially dire. FCSS offices are increasingly becoming "catch-all" hubs for residents facing complex challenges – from mental health crises to housing insecurity – often without access to other services.



Sourced from Alberta Municipal Affairs, Municipal Financial Information Returns, Schedule C, column 01400 as of January 2025. The province's spending on FCSS is based on the Government of Alberta's annual Government Estimates reports. Total municipal spending has been adjusted to reflect the portion of spending funded by the province.

## Increasing Demand and Complexity

Along with flat funding and growing pressure on municipalities to make up the difference, a series of wider challenges are affecting FCSS program delivery. Communities are experiencing increased demand for social services, more complex needs among residents, increasing centralization of social programs, and limited transportation or other accessible service options.

## Wider Municipal and Community Service Funding Ecosystem

The success of FCSS relies on a network of community organizations, many of which are supported by the Community Initiatives Program (CIP), Community Facility Enhancement Program (CFEP), and other grants now also facing reductions. Navigation and referrals through FCSS depend on the availability of broader community supports and organizations.

Between 2010 and 2024, CIP funding dropped from \$6 to \$2 dollars per person when adjusted for inflation. CFEP funding fell from \$11 to \$7 per person over the same period. These cuts come at a time of rising demand for prevention, mental health, and community services due to population growth, inflation, and increased complexity of social needs.

Municipalities more generally have experienced significant provincial funding cuts in the past 15 years. Between 2009 and 2024, provincial funding to municipalities was cut in half. Which means that while municipalities have significantly increased funding for community services, they have done so at a time of wider funding cuts.

Trends in Government of Alberta Funding Decisions on Prevention				
Program/Grant	2024-2025 (\$M)	2025-2026 (\$M)	Change (\$M)	How funding supports FCSS & prevention
Mental Health & Addiction - Prevention	87.1	67.1	-20.0 23% reduction	Direct funding for prevention programs (e.g., youth mental health, addiction prevention) often delivered by FCSS partners.
Community Initiatives Program (CIP)	16.0	14.0	-2.0 12.5% reduction	Grants to non-profits, many of which run FCSS-aligned prevention, wellness, and inclusion programs.
CFEP Capital Grants	50.0	25.0	-25.0 50% reduction	Capital grants for building/renovating community facilities where FCSS and partners deliver prevention programming.
Civil Society Fund (Family & Community Safety)	19.4	16.4	-3.0 15% reduction	Supports community-based prevention and safety initiatives.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>172.5</b>	<b>122.5</b>	<b>-50.0</b>	<b>Direct funding for prevention programs (e.g., youth mental health, addiction prevention) often delivered by FCSS partners.</b>

## Prevention Reduces Long-term Costs

Strong, vibrant Alberta communities depend on preventing people from falling into crisis in the first place. Every dollar invested in prevention leads to lower costs in emergency services, policing, and health care. The implications of inadequate funding for prevention efforts are significant. When FCSS programs are weakened, the burden shifts to more expensive systems like policing, hospitals, and shelters. Alberta Municipalities is articulating the case that investment in prevention is key to ensuring our municipal members have an active role in helping the provincial government bend the cost curve for health services, policing and emergency response in our province. It is not only the right thing to do it is the fiscally sound thing to do. Investing in crises response only creates a circular repeat impact, we need to work together to break the cycle.

# **SECTION TWO**

# **ADVOCACY TOOLS**

# Advocacy Tools

## Engagement Roadmap

### WHY NOW?

The 2026 Provincial Budget is expected by the end of February and increased investment in FCSS is one of ABmunis' top three priorities.

ABmunis submitted its budget requests to the Minister of Finance in September 2025 and has had ongoing meetings with provincial officials over the past three months.

ABmunis members can demonstrate broad support and drive the message home by amplifying the importance of FCSS and the need to bring funding levels in line with population and inflation.

### Options for Engagement

- Council could draft a letter to your local MLA and send a copy to Minister Nixon.
- Council or administration could do interviews with local media.
- Council and administration could speak to residents.
- Share Fact Sheets at events, in communications, and at meetings.
- Amplify Alberta Municipality social media postings.

## Focusing on prevention, FCSS programs help Albertans address health and social issues before they escalate into a crisis.

### Elements of a Strong Advocacy Letter

- **Paragraph 1:** Purpose and Core Ask
  - Include an introduction.
  - Clarify the purpose of letter.
  - Clearly state the core ask.
- **Paragraph 2:** Context and Rationale
  - Outline the issue.
  - Identify who is impacted and why it matters; include local examples.
  - One or two key data points
- **Paragraph 3:** Call to Action
  - Emphasize willingness to collaborate or provide more information.
  - Close letter by restating core request.
- **Tone:** Constructive and solution-oriented
- **Highlight the win-win:** Investing in FCSS and prevention aligns with government priorities and bends the cost-curve.

### Key Messages

- Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) providers are a cornerstone of Alberta communities.
- Over the past ten years, provincial funding for FCSS has not kept up with population growth and inflation.
- Adjusted for these factors, provincial FCSS funding today should be about \$162 million.
- Every dollar invested in prevention leads to lower costs in emergency services, policing, and healthcare.

# FCSS Fact Sheet

## What is FCSS?

- FCSS is a cornerstone prevention program that tackles issues early, so they do not escalate into costlier responses such as health, justice, and emergency services.
- FCSS delivers at scale with close to 200 programs across over 300 communities.
- FCSS enables local decision-making over programs and services needed in communities across the province.
- It is cost-shared with participating municipalities and Metis settlements contributing a minimum of 20% of the funds and the province funding up to 80%.

*In 2023, Cochrane FCSS saw a **259% increase** in seniors needing help applying for benefits – a sign of systems that are harder to navigate, changing demographics, and clients with compounding needs.*

## Demand is Rising

- Relatively flat provincial funding over the past decade, combined with inflation and rapid population growth, has eroded per-capita support.
- Centralization of provincial services and reduced local access mean FCSS is often the “only game in town,” especially in rural and remote communities.
- FCSS providers are increasingly required to act as AISH/ADAP workers, income support workers, or benefits navigators when no local staff remain for these services.

*Kneehill FCSS recorded a **22% increase of service hours** in 2024. These included referrals to Alberta Supports, local food, clothing and furniture banks, mental health, and housing supports.*

## Complexity & Scope Creep

- FCSS providers report increased demand and complexity from more referrals to food, housing, mental health supports, and seniors’ benefits navigation.
- Between 2018 and 2023, 82% of rural FCSS directors noted more residents arriving in crisis; 18% say this level of crisis happens multiple times a day.<sup>1</sup>
- When FCSS is pulled into crisis roles, their capacity is stretched, diluting the key prevention mandate.

*In Edmonton, most people seeking help in 2024 **were dealing with multiple, overlapping issues** including mental health concerns, addictions, unstable housing, and financial strain.*

<sup>1</sup> University of Alberta and RMA, *Understanding and Responding to the Challenges Faced by FCSS Programs in Rural Alberta* p. 15.

## PREVENTION IN ACTION: HOW FCSS MAKES A DIFFERENCE

**Tax-filing support** unlocks benefits, keeps families housed, and prevents costlier system use.

*"In Cold Lake, we saw the true spirit of Alberta in action. Thanks to the dedication of skilled volunteers, nearly 300 low-income residents received critical support in filing their taxes—unlocking over \$2 million in federal and provincial benefits. That's not just a number. That's rent paid, food on the table and dignity restored. This is what community-driven leadership looks like. It's about empowering Albertans to stay housed, healthy and hopeful. And it's a reminder that when we invest in people, the returns go far beyond the financial." **Cold Lake & District FCSS***

**Seniors outreach & connection** reduce isolation that contributes to hospitalizations, falls and vulnerability to elder abuse—helping seniors stay well and **lowering healthcare costs**.

*"Across Alberta, our seniors are showing us what resilience truly looks like. They're gathering in local groups, supporting one another and embracing newcomers with open arms. Through intergenerational programs, they're building bridges to younger generations—and they're not afraid to ask for help when they need it." **Golden Circle Seniors Centre Rural Outreach Services - Red Deer & District FCSS***

**Culturally grounded programming** supports healing and resilience—**improving health outcomes** for Indigenous peoples.

*"One Indigenous woman, shaped by a childhood intergenerational trauma and silence, found healing through the Cree language. Her journey—marked by grief, resilience and a fierce love for her children—led her to a classroom where Elder Linda offered sacred teachings and a space to belong." **Re-Connect Community Micro-Grants – Red Deer & District FCSS***



### Investing in Prevention is Cost-Effective

- Every dollar spent on prevention can save between \$7 and \$12 in future costs.<sup>2</sup>
- Housing First programs that focus on keeping people housed save \$1 to \$3 for every dollar invested.<sup>3</sup>
- When a person stays housed, the healthcare system saves significantly because an unhoused person costs Canada's health system seven times more annually than someone with stable housing.<sup>4</sup>
- Parent education and family support programs – like home visits and early childhood education – boost mental health and reduce depression and anxiety, yielding \$2 to \$17 in savings for every dollar invested.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Heckman, J. J., Moon, S. H., Pinto, R., Savelyev, P. A., & Yavitz, A. (2010). The Rate of Return to the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program. *Journal of Public Economics*, 94(1-2), 114–128.

<sup>3</sup> Ontario Housing First Regional Network Community of Interest, (2021) "Evidence at a glance: Housing First and costs", p. 1-2. Accessed: [Evidence at a glance: Housing First and costs](#).

<sup>4</sup> Richard, L., Carter, B., Nisenbaum, R. et al. Disparities in healthcare costs of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto, Canada in the post COVID-19 pandemic era: a matched cohort study. *BMC Health Serv Res* 24, 1074 (2024). Accessed: [The Cost of Inaction: Healthcare Expenses Associated with Homelessness in Toronto | Homeless Hub](#).

<sup>5</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada, *Why investing in mental health will contribute to Canada's economic prosperity and to the sustainability of our health system: Backgrounder*, p. 3. Accessed: [MHStrategy\\_CaseForInvestment\\_ENG\\_0\\_1.pdf](#)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is FCSS?

- FCSS is a locally guided prevention program that tackles issues early on.
- FCSS currently has close to 200 programs in over 300 municipalities and Metis Settlements.
- It is cost-shared with participating municipalities and Metis settlements contributing a minimum of 20% of the funds and the province funding 80%.
- FCSS services help people develop coping skills, build healthy relationships, make responsible decisions and stay engaged in their communities.
- From parenting classes, youth mentoring, senior supports or volunteer programs, the aim is to improve wellbeing now and build resilience for the future.

### Why should the province increase funding to FCSS?

- FCSS has not had a meaningful provincial funding increase in 10 years, aside from a small \$5M bump in 2023, funding has stayed at \$100M since 2015.
- In that same decade, Alberta grew by 1 million people, and inflation averaged 2.25% a year.
- Based on population and inflation, FCSS funding should be about \$162M annually, not \$105M.
- FCSS prevents crises before they happen, reducing demand for hospitals, police, emergency services, and the justice system.
- Investing now in FCSS will save Alberta later: every dollar invested in FCSS reduces long-term system costs.
- Jurisdictions that have successfully bent the cost curve on health care, policing, and emergency response have significant prevention programs delivered through local leadership and state partnership.

### What does complexity mean?

- This usually means an Albertan who accesses an FCSS provider is experiencing multiple crises at one time.
- Complex needs reach beyond day-to-day challenges and require time, unique supports, and coordinated effort to address.<sup>6</sup>
- These situations often require more intensive intervention than FCSS is designed to provide.

### Will a provincial FCSS raise our municipal share?

- FCSS is meant to be 80% provincial / 20% municipal, but that balance no longer exists.
- Many municipalities are already paying over 20% of FCSS-eligible costs.
  - In rural Alberta, 63% of FCSS programs exceed the 20% municipal share.<sup>7</sup>
  - In Kneehill Region, municipalities covered 29% of FCSS costs in 2023.
  - Edmonton contributed 29% in 2024 and Calgary 25% in 2023.
- With stagnant provincial funding, over the past decade municipalities have had to step up, doubling their investments in community and social services to \$240 million in 2024.
- A proper provincial increase would amplify local dollars, so municipalities aren't left carrying the load alone.

<sup>6</sup> Strathcona County Family and Community Services, September 2025, "Understanding complexity in our work at Strathcona County, Family and Community Services", p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> University of Alberta and RMA, *Understanding and Responding to the Challenges Faced by FCSS Programs in Rural Alberta* p. 15.

### More Information on FCSS

Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta (FCSSAA)  
[fcssaa.org](http://fcssaa.org)

### More Information Municipal Funding Issues

Alberta Municipalities: Property Taxes Reimagined  
[ABmunis.ca](http://ABmunis.ca)





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