Prevention Works:

Local FCSS Advocacy Toolkit





Alberta Municipalities
Strength In Members

Published: November 24, 2026

Security Classification: Public

Contents

Introduction 4
The Case for Funding FCSS 6
Advocacy Tools 9
Engagement Roadmap 9
Tell your FCSS Story in Three Steps 10
FCSS Fact Sheet 12

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 had occurred since the last major funding increase in 2015.

This toolkit is designed to help municipal councils and administrations champion the importance of FCSS and advocate effectively for the increased 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, send letters to the Minister responsible, and communicate with your community.

Use this toolkit to:

- Share strong, consistent messages about the value of FCSS in preventing crises and reducing long-term system costs.
- Understand the current state of FCSS funding and why it's falling behind Alberta's needs.
- 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)?

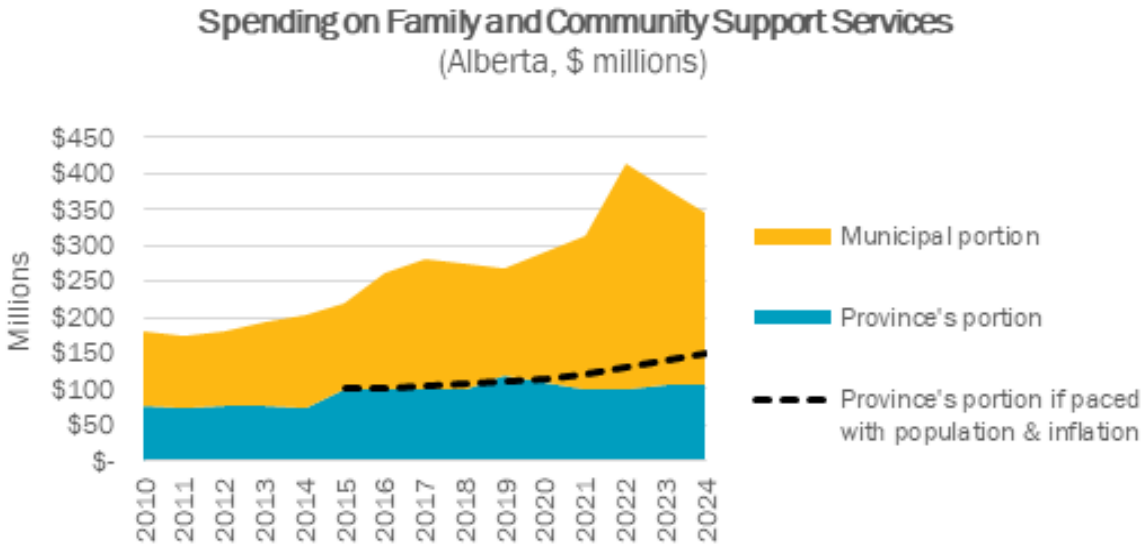
FCSS providers are a cornerstone of Alberta communities. Focusing on prevention, these programs help Albertans address health and social issues before they escalate into a crisis. FCSS is a uniquely Albertan program that works within a provincial priorities framework and enables local autonomy and decision-making 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 in 2026 provincial FCSS funding should be closer to $163 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.

Overall, municipalities have experienced significant provincial funding cuts in the past 15 years. Between 2009 and 2024, provincial funding to municipalities was cut in half. This 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.
TOTAL	**172.5**	**122.5**	**-50.0**	**Direct funding for prevention programs (e.g., youth mental health, addiction prevention) often delivered by FCSS partners.**

Prevention Reduces Long-term Costs

Strong, vibrant Alberta communities depend on preventive measures to keep people from falling into crisis in the first place. The implications of inadequate funding for prevention efforts are significant. Every dollar invested in prevention leads to lower costs in emergency services, policing, and health care. When FCSS programs are weakened, the burden shifts to reactive care largely funded by municipalities. Alberta Municipalities is making the case that investment in prevention is critical. It will ensure our municipal members have an active role in helping the provincial government bend the cost curve for health services, policing and emergency response. It is not only the right thing to do, it is the fiscally sound thing to do. Focusing on crisis maintains a cycle we cannot afford.

SECTION TWO
ADVOCACY TOOLS

Advocacy Tools

Engagement Roadmap

WHY NOW?

Budget 2027 is the last before the next provincial election.

Now is the time to get the provincial government's commitment to this increase before the election campaign.

Members can strengthen this effort by highlighting the importance of FCSS, the need to align provincial funding with population growth and inflation, and your municipality's commitment to FCSS.

Options for Engagement

- Council could draft a letter to Minister Fir, sending a copy to Minister Nixon, the Premier, and your local MLA.
- 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 Municipalities and FCSSAA social media posts.

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

- FCSS programs play a key role in supporting people and strengthening communities across Alberta.
- Over the past 11 years, provincial funding has not kept up with population growth and inflation.
- We are asking the province to increase funding to about $163 million—built over time through a phased approach.
- This is a shared investment, with municipalities increasing their contributions alongside the province through the 80/20 partnership.
- Investing in prevention saves money by reducing pressure on emergency services, policing, and health care.

Tell your FCSS Story in Three Steps

Steps	Prompts
Step 1: The Situation (What was happening?) • Who needed help? • What challenge were they facing? • What likely would have happened *without* help?	"In our community, a community member/family/group was dealing with _____ (e.g., struggling to access benefits / at risk of eviction). Without support, most likely they would have _____ (eg. not been able to afford food / been evicted).
Step 2: The Intervention (What did FCSS do?) • What FCSS prevention program or service stepped in? • What did that support look like?	"Through FCSS, we were able to _____ (e.g., provide tax filing support, connect to benefits, offer outreach)."
Step 3: The Outcome (What changed?) • What changed? • What was avoided? • Why does this matter beyond the individual?	"As a result, they [outcome], avoiding [crisis/system impact] … (e.g., the individual remained housed, accessed income supports, avoided emergency services)." "This is why FCSS matters because…" • "…it prevents people from needing more costly emergency supports." • "…it helps people stay stable and connected to their community." • "…it reduces pressure on health, policing, and social systems."

A strong FCSS story shows how early support prevented a situation from becoming a crisis, and reduced pressure on more costly systems.

What Makes a Strong Prevention Story	What to Avoid
• Be specific (one person, one situation) • Show what would have happened without FCSS • Connect to a bigger system (costs, demand, services)Keep it short (3-5 sentences max)	• Listing programs without naming the impact • Speaking only in general terms ("we support people") • Overloading with stats (use one max, if needed)

Examples: What strong FCSS stories looks like

1) Youth / Family

In our community, a teen was disengaging from school and struggling with anxiety, putting them at risk of falling behind and becoming disconnected from supports.

Without early support, they may have dropped out and required more intensive mental health and social services.

Through FCSS, they were connected to a youth mentorship program that helped rebuild confidence and strengthen relationships at home.

As a result, they re-engaged in school, stabilized at home, and avoided the need for more intensive interventions—reducing classroom complexity and pressure on mental health and social services.

This is what prevention looks like.

2) Housing Stability

In our municipality, a community member was at risk of eviction after falling behind on rent due to unstable employment and difficulty accessing available benefits.

Without early support, they likely would have lost their housing and required emergency shelter and other crisis services.

Through FCSS, they were supported to file taxes, connect to income benefits, and access local housing supports.

As a result, they were able to remain housed and stabilize their situation—avoiding homelessness and reducing pressure on emergency shelters and social services.

This is how FCSS prevents crises before they happen.

3) Senior Isolation

In my town, a senior living alone stopped showing up to a drop-in program they had attended regularly—an early sign of growing isolation.

Without early support, they were at risk of declining health and eventually needing more intensive care.

Through FCSS, staff reached out and connected them to outreach supports and local programs that helped rebuild social connections.

As a result, they remained healthy, connected, and supported. This reduced pressure on healthcare and emergency services.

This is the role FCSS plays in building stronger, more resilient communities.

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.[1]
- 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.*

[1] 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.[2]
- Housing First programs that focus on keeping people housed save $1 to $3 for every dollar invested. [3]
- 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.[4]
- 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.[5]

[2] 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.
[3] 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.
[4] 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.
[5] 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.

More Information on FCSS

Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta (FCSSAA)

fcssaa.org

More Information Municipal Funding Issues

Alberta Municipalities: Property Taxes Reimagined

ABmunis.ca

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 $163M 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.[6]
- 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.[7]
    - 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 $245 million in 2024.
- A proper provincial increase would amplify local dollars, so municipalities aren't left carrying the load alone.

[6] Strathcona County Family and Community Services, September 2025, "Understanding complexity in our work at Strathcona County, Family and Community Services", p. 1.
[7] University of Alberta and RMA, *Understanding and Responding to the Challenges Faced by FCSS Programs in Rural Alberta* p. 15.

Alberta Municipalities
Strength In Members

Connect

300, 8616 51 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T6E 6E6
780.433.4431 ■ 310.MUNI

abmunis.ca