

Strategic Plan

2026-2029

Social Supports
and Well-Being





MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

As Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, I am pleased to present the department's Strategic Plan for the period April 1, 2026 to March 31, 2029. This plan builds upon the strategic directions, commitments and investments of our government and identifies the department's key goals and objectives for the 2026-29 planning period.

The Department of Social Supports and Well-Being focuses on policies, practices and services that respect diversity, promote equity, and reduce barriers to accessing programs and supports, and to self-determination. Our work emphasizes prevention, early intervention, and protection so that all individuals in the province are supported to thrive. In partnership with community organizations and other government departments, SSWB is committed to ensuring an inclusive and accessible province that supports children, youth, families and individuals at all stages of life.

This plan is submitted in accordance with the requirements of a Category 1 entity under the **Transparency and Accountability Act**. As Minister, I am accountable for the preparation of this plan and for achieving the goals and objectives outlined within.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joedy Wall". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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

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Departmental Overview

The Department of Social Supports and Well-Being (SSWB) is a category 1 entity under the **Transparency and Accountability Act** and focuses on supporting individuals, families and communities to improve social well-being and reduce poverty, while ensuring the protection of children and youth from abuse or neglect.

SSWB is organized across five service delivery and policy branches with responsibilities spanning child and youth services, income support, poverty reduction and the community sector. The department also leads key cross-government initiatives, including the Disability Policy Office and the development and implementation of Newfoundland and Labrador's 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy. SSWB is both a direct service provider and a strategic policy leader advancing social development and well-being outcomes across the province.

Mandate

The Department of Social Supports and Well-Being (SSWB) supports individuals, families and communities in Newfoundland and Labrador in achieving improved social well-being and reduced poverty. The department delivers income support and programs and services to support children and youth who are at risk of or who have experienced abuse or neglect. SSWB collaborates with the community sector to foster their role in social development. Further, the department promotes inclusion and diversity and leads the development of policies, programs and partnerships to improve services for people of all ages, including persons with disabilities, so they can meet their basic needs and participate fully in society and the economy.

The mandate for the department is primarily established under the following legislation:

- **Accessibility Act**
- **Adoption Act, 2013**
- **Children, Youth and Families Act**

- **Income and Employment Support Act**
- **Young Persons Offences Act**

Vision

A province where everyone has the supports to live with dignity, safety and well-being.

Lines of Business

Program and Services Administration

SSWB provides direct supervision and service delivery for the following:

- Adoptions – finds permanent homes for children available for adoption and supports permanency planning to improve long-term outcomes for children and youth in care.
- Child Protection and In-Care – supports the safety and well-being of children and youth who require protective intervention, kinship care, in care services and foster placements, and youth services.
- Community Youth Corrections – provides community-based services to youth who come into conflict with the law between their 12th and 18th birthdays.
- Youth Services – provides support to youth who cannot safely remain in parental care during their transition to early adulthood.
- Community Youth Programming – provides community-based support programming to youth focused on education, engagement and empowerment.
- Income Support – provides financial support and supplementary benefits to qualifying people, primarily aged 18 to 64, to help meet basic needs and improve economic security, and promotes self-reliance by providing incentives and supports to encourage increased labour market participation.

Policy and Program Support

SSWB provides a leadership role in developing policies, legislation and plans in the following areas:

- Child and Youth Services Policy – advances program and policy development to promote the safety and well-being of children, youth and families.
- Disability Policy – leads policy development and government-wide collaboration to remove barriers and improve accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities.
- Community Well-Being – collaborates with cross-sector partners to understand local community needs, align efforts, and jointly support solutions that advance individual and community well-being.
- Poverty Reduction and Prevention – leads government-wide policy development designed to prevent, reduce and alleviate poverty for all individuals and families to share fully in our society and economy.
- Income Support Policy – advances program and policy development related to the Income Support program and the associated legislative requirements.

Additional information about the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being can be found on the department's website: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/sswb/>

Primary Clients

SSWB serves a wide range of clients, focusing on individuals and families across the lifespan who may be experiencing economic or social challenges, including:

- Children, youth and families who require protective intervention;
- Children, youth and families involved with adoptions program;
- Youth engaged in community youth programming focused on education, engagement and empowerment;
- Youth involved in the youth justice system;
- Individuals and families experiencing poverty or economic insecurity; and
- Persons with disabilities.

In carrying out its work, SSWB collaborates with Indigenous governments and organizations, community organizations, non-profit agencies and other partners to deliver services, strengthen community well-being and improve outcomes for clients.

Staff and Budget

Branch	# of Employees	Budget
Minister’s Office and Executive Support	17	1,548,200
Corporate Services and Performance Improvement	109	7,727,300
Child and Youth Services	692	222,625,800
Policy and Programs	29	10,985,800
Prevention and Early Intervention	219	244,480,800
Healthy Communities	10	4,709,500

As of April 1, 2026, SSWB had 1,076 positions.

The Child and Youth Services Branch is structured into Central-West Region, Labrador Region and Metro Region, as follows:

- Central-West: 257 positions, with offices located in Baie Verte, Bonavista, Botwood, Channel-Port-aux-Basques, Clarenville, Conne River, Corner Brook, Deer Lake, Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor, Harbour Breton, Holyrood, Lewisporte, Marystown, Musgrave Harbour, Placentia, Roddickton, Springdale, St. Alban’s, St. Anthony, Stephenville, Summerford and Whitbourne;

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- Labrador: 124 positions, with offices located in Cartwright, Forteau, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Hopedale, Labrador City, Makkovik, Nain, Natuashish, Rigolet and Sheshatshiu; and
- Metro: 292 positions, with offices located in Bay Roberts, Bell Island, Conception Bay South, Ferryland, Harbour Grace, and St. John's.

The Income Support Service Delivery Division, within the Prevention and Early Intervention Branch, has 211 positions with offices located in: in St. John's, Carbonear, Marystown, Clarenville, Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor, Stephenville, Corner Brook, Channel-Port-aux-Basques and Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

The department's 2026-27 gross budget is \$492,077,400.

Strategic Issues

Issue One: Improving Outcomes for Children, Youth and Families

The Department of Social Supports and Well-Being (SSWB) is working to improve outcomes for children, youth and families by delivering supportive services to families and increasing access to safe and stable homes. When children cannot safely remain at home, it is important they have a permanent, caring place to live as early as possible. Permanency can include safely staying with family, returning home when it is safe, living with relatives (kinship care), foster care or adoption. This is a key priority as children and youth who find stable living arrangements sooner tend to have better long-term well-being outcomes.

Over the next three years, SSWB will focus on helping more children and youth achieve permanency. To accomplish this, SSWB must strengthen capacity within the system to support timely, stable placements. This includes supporting prevention and parenting programs, increasing adoption finalizations, increasing the number of foster care and kinship homes, and maintaining a skilled workforce across all regions. These efforts also require a stronger focus on early support to help families stay together safely, where possible.

SSWB continues to respond to evolving pressures that impact timely permanency outcomes for children and youth. The department has experienced challenges related to workforce capacity, including vacancies in frontline Child and Youth Services roles, which can affect service delivery. At the same time, there has been a decline in the number of foster families available, creating added pressure in identifying appropriate placements for children in care. Broader cost-of-living pressures are also affecting foster and kinship families, highlighting the importance of ensuring financial support remains responsive to their needs. This three-year plan addresses these interconnected pressures with actions to improve safety, stability and well-being for children, youth and families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

GOAL

By March 31, 2029, SSWB will have strengthened its capacity to provide supports and services that ensure more timely access to safe and stable homes (permanency) to improve well-being outcomes for children, youth and families.

Indicators

- Finalized more than 200 adoptions.
- Increased foster homes by 20 per cent.
- Reduced the number of Indigenous children and youth in care.
- Reduced the vacancy rate for frontline Child and Youth Services social workers.

Objective 1: 2026-2027

By March 31, 2027, SSWB will have implemented foundational program, policy and workforce initiatives to strengthen capacity for permanency planning and improve supports for children, youth and families.

Indicators:

- Ensured that all relevant Child and Youth Services staff have completed the Foundations of Adoption Practice training to better support the adoptions program.
- Launched the re-designed Foster a Future website and commenced a provincial foster care recruitment advertising campaign to attract additional foster families.
- Implemented increases to financial supports for foster and kinship homes to ensure families have the resources required to provide safe and stable care.
- Implemented financial incentives to support recruitment and retention efforts to ensure sufficient staffing across the province.
- Implemented early prevention supports for families in all regions.

Objective 2: 2027-2028

By March 31, 2028, SSWB will have expanded permanency-focused initiatives to increase adoption finalizations, grow foster care and kinship capacity, strengthen prevention supports and improve workforce stability.

Objective 3: 2028-2029

By March 31, 2029, SSWB will have strengthened and sustained permanency planning practices and workforce capacity to improve timely access to permanency and enhance well-being outcomes for children, youth and families.

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Issue Two: Advancing Poverty Reduction and Prevention

Poverty affects many people and communities across Newfoundland and Labrador, with disproportionate impacts experienced by children, persons with disabilities and people facing barriers to work or housing. Reducing and preventing poverty requires long-term effort across government, communities and regions, and an understanding of the complex social and economic factors that influence individual and family well-being.

During the 2026–2029 planning period, the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being will advance the development and early implementation of a new 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy with the goal of making our province's poverty rates the lowest in the country. This work will take a government-wide approach with a focus on practical, forward-looking solutions. SSWB will provide leadership in strengthening income security, prevention, and community-based supports, informed by engagement with Indigenous governments, community organizations, service providers, and people with lived and living experience of poverty. Through this strategic issue, the Department will support the development of a coordinated approach to poverty reduction and prevention that improves access to supports and contributes to better long-term outcomes for individuals, families, and communities across the province.

GOAL:

By March 31, 2029, SSWB will have implemented priority initiatives to reduce poverty and improve well-being for individuals and families.

Indicators:

- Developed a 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy.
- Implemented actions from the Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy to reduce poverty and improve well-being.
- Strengthened coordination across government and community partners to address poverty.

Objective 1: 2026-2027

By March 31, 2027, SSWB will have developed a government-wide 10-year poverty reduction and prevention strategy.

Indicators:

- Held engagement sessions throughout the province with community organizations, Indigenous governments, partners, and individuals with lived experience.
- Identified priorities and actions informed by engagement sessions, research and other consultation activity.
- Developed a 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy.

Objective 2: 2027-2028

By March 31, 2028, SSWB will have implemented initiatives to reduce and prevent poverty and improve economic security for individuals and families across the province.

Objective 3: 2028-2029

By March 31, 2029, SSWB will have continued implementation of the poverty reduction and prevention strategy and reported on progress of priority initiatives.

Annex A – Strategic Directions for Multi-Year Planning

Strategic Direction 1: Supporting Children, Youth and Families to Achieve Safety, Stability, and Long-term Well-Being

Throughout 2026-2029, SSWB will focus on supporting children, youth and families by enhancing permanency planning; prioritizing the recruitment and retention of foster homes and kinship homes; and strengthening family-based care, and prevention and support services. This aligns with the department's mandate and government's priorities related to child well-being, workforce sustainability, and reconciliation informed approaches to services for Indigenous children, youth, and families.

Desired Outcomes:

Children and youth who require protective intervention receive more consistent and coordinated supports that promote safety and well-being, while services for children and youth are delivered through a sustainable and supported workforce across all regions.

Areas of Focus:

- **Permanency Planning:** Strengthening adoption, kinship care, foster care and reunification approaches to support stable, long-term living arrangements for children and youth.
- **Workforce Sustainability:** Supporting recruitment, retention, safety and professional development of frontline staff to maintain service capacity, particularly in rural and regional contexts.
- **Early and Coordinated Supports:** Enhancing prevention, early intervention and cross-government collaboration to support families earlier and reduce the need for more intensive intervention over time.
- **Indigenous Collaboration and Reconciliation:** Working in partnership with Indigenous governments and organizations to support culturally responsive and reconciliation-informed approaches to child and family services.

Strategic Direction 2: Reducing and Preventing Poverty

SSWB will lead the development of a responsive, 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy, in alignment with government priorities related to affordability, healthy and safe communities and social inclusion.

Desired Outcomes:

To reduce poverty for individuals and families experiencing it, and to prevent poverty among those at risk.

Areas of Focus:

- **Income and Disability Supports:** Improving accessibility, adequacy, and navigation of income and disability supports, including strengthening advocacy and client-centred service approaches.
- **Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy Implementation:** Supporting coordinated implementation of poverty reduction and prevention actions across government, partners and communities.
- **Prevention and Early Intervention:** Investing in early supports, community well-being initiatives and social inclusion efforts that reduce long-term poverty risks.
- **Community and Partner Engagement:** Working with municipalities, Indigenous governments, community organizations and people with lived experience to inform planning and implementation.

Annex B – Active Entities

The Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being (SSWB) is also responsible for two entities, which carry out their own strategic planning and performance reporting in accordance with the **Transparency and Accountability Act**. These include:

Accessibility Standards Advisory Board

The Accessibility Standards Advisory Board is responsible for advising and making recommendations to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities regarding the establishment and content of accessibility standards and the time periods for implementation.

Pursuant to section 9 of the **Accessibility Act**, the Board shall consist of a minimum of seven members and a maximum of nine members, including a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. Members are eligible for reappointment but shall not serve for longer than two consecutive terms.

Income and Employment Support Appeal Board

The Income and Employment Support Appeal Board is an independent, arm's length body authorized to hear appeals on decisions regarding Income Support, as well as eligibility for employment supports funded by the Provincial Government. The Board is primarily governed by the **Income and Employment Support Act**; however, it is also responsible for appeals with respect to eligibility for benefits under the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program (NLPDP), under section 40 of the Pharmaceutical Services Act, and section 4.2 of the **Health and Community Services Act – Employability Assistance Agreement for Persons with Disabilities**.

Pursuant to section 42 of the **Income and Employment Support Act**, the Board is comprised of a Chair, a Vice-Chair and a Member, one of whom must be a current or

former recipient of income or employment support. Three alternate members are also appointed, one of whom must also be a current or former recipient of income or employment support.

