

**M.D. of Ranchland No.66  
Council Meeting Agenda**

**Municipal Building  
Chain Lakes Provincial Park**

**September 5, 2023  
at 1:00 PM**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

**Pages:**

**2. ACCEPTANCE OF AGENDA**

**3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- A. Council Meeting of August 15, 2023.....Pages 3-6
- B.
- C.

**4. DELEGATION'S SCHEDULE**

- A.
- B.

**5. EXTERNAL CORRESPONDENCE – (for information)**

- A. Administration/ Finance
- B. Public Works
- C. Agriculture/ Parks & Recreation
- D. Emergency/ Protective Services
- E. Legislative / Planning /Development
- F. Other Business
  - i. Chinook Arch Library Board Report – August 2023.....Pages 7-8
  - ii. TC Energy Blowdown Notification.....Pages 9-11
  - iii.

**6. BUSINESS – (action items)**

**A. Administration/ Finance**

- i. Statement of Operations – as of July 31, 2023.....Pages 12-17
- ii. 2024 Municipal Operating and Capital Budget Schedule.....Pages 18-19
- iii.

**B. Public Works**

i.

**C. Agriculture/ Parks & Recreation**

i.

**D. Emergency/Protective Services**

i.

**E. Legislative/ & Planning/Development**

- i. AER community engagement event.....Page 20-25
- ii. Public Notification Bylaw No. 2023-05.....Pages 26-30
- iii. Update re: MLA / MP Meetings.....Page 31
- iv. Update re: Meeting with Provincial Minister of Environment.....Page 32-33
- v. Discussion re: Potential joint meeting with Minister/ Associate  
Minister of Health at the Fall RMA Convention. ....Page 34
- vi. Foothills Little Bow Municipal Association.....Page 35

**F. Other Business**

- i. RMA Report on FCSS. ....Pages 36-73

**7. IN-CAMERA (closed session)**

A. Speers Creek Bridge Project - Finalization

B.

**8. BUSINESS ARISING FROM IN-CAMERA**

A. Administration/ Finance

B. Public Works

- Speers Creek Bridge Project - Finalization

C. Agriculture/ Parks & Recreation

D. Emergency/Protective Services

E. Legislative /& Planning /Development

F. Other Business

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

**M.D. of Ranchland No. 66**  
**Minutes of the Regular Council Meeting**  
**Tuesday, August 15, 2023**

The meeting of the Council of the Municipal District of Ranchland No. 66 was held in Council Chambers in the Municipal Office located at the Chain Lakes Provincial Park on Tuesday, August 15, 2023, commencing at 10:30 a.m.

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**IN ATTENDANCE**

Ron Davis, Reeve  
Harry Streeter, Deputy Reeve  
Cam Gardner, Councillor

Robert Strauss, Chief Administrative Officer  
Greg Brkich, Accountant  
Sheldon Steinke, Council Liaison  
Nikki Funk, Recording Clerk

Kelly Starling, Director of Emergency Services  
Cpl. Sean Dutch, Claresholm RCMP Detachment  
Cpl. Thomas Nairn, Nanton RCMP Detachment  
Cpl. (Acting). Christopher McKerracher, CNP RCMP Detachment

**CALL TO ORDER**

Reeve Davis called the meeting to order at 10:47 a.m.

**ACCEPTANCE OF AGENDA**

**Motion No. 23/08/15/267** MOVED by Deputy Reeve Streeter that the agenda be adopted as amended with the addition of:

6.C.i – Declaration of an Agricultural Disaster  
6.B.ii – Hwy 533 Markings at Flying E Road Intersection

CARRIED

**ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

**Motion No. 23/08/15/268** MOVED by Deputy Reeve Streeter that the minutes of the August 1, 2023, meeting be adopted as presented.

CARRIED

**EXTERNAL CORRESPONDENCE**

**Motion No. 23/08/15/269** 5.E.i – Alberta Utilities Commission Letter  
MOVED by Councillor Gardner to accept the correspondence letter from the Alberta Utilities Commission for information.

CARRIED

**BUSINESS**

**Motion No. 23/08/15/270**      6.A.i – Bank Rec and Vendor Payment  
MOVED by Councillor Gardner to accept the Bank Rec and Vendor Payment Report for information.  
  
CARRIED

**Motion No. 23/08/15/271**      6.B.ii – Hwy 533 Lane Markings at Flying E Road Intersection  
MOVED by Reeve Davis to direct administration to relay Council’s concerns regarding the lane markings on Hwy 533 at the Flying E Road, and the inquiry regarding traffic counts on Highway 22 with Darren Davidson, Regional Director of Alberta Transportation.  
  
CARRIED

**Motion No. 23/08/15/272**      6.B.i – Response from Alberta Transportation, Regional Director Darren Davidson  
MOVED by Councillor Gardner to accept the follow-up email from Darren Davidson, Regional Director of Alberta Transportation, for info.  
  
CARRIED

**Motion No. 23/08/15/273**      6.C.i – Declaration of Agricultural Disaster  
MOVED by Councillor Gardner that the Municipal District of Ranchland officially declare an agricultural disaster for 2023 season due to drought conditions.  
  
CARRIED

**Motion No. 23/08/15/274**      6.E.i – Foothills/Littlebow Meeting Resolutions  
MOVED by Reeve Davis that the discussion about meeting resolution submission deadlines for the upcoming Foothills/Littlebow meeting, be accepted for information.  
  
CARRIED

**Motion No. 23/08/15/275**      6.E.ii – Request for meeting with Minister of Environment, Minister Schulz - Update  
MOVED by Deputy Reeve Streeter to accept the potential update and discussion regarding a potential meeting with the Minister of Environment, Minister Schulz, for information.  
  
CARRIED

**Motion No. 23/08/15/276**      6.E.iii – Offer for Meeting with Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister McIver  
MOVED by Reeve Davis that the MD of Ranchland respond to the RMA convention letter, from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, stating that we do not require a meeting.  
  
CARRIED

Reeve Davis recessed the meeting at 12:00 p.m.  
Reeve Davis resumed the meeting at 12:59 p.m.  
Sheldon Steinke joined the meeting at 12:59 p.m.



**Motion No. 23/08/15/277** 6.E.iv – Potential Meeting with MLA Petrovic and MP Barlow  
MOVED by Reeve Davis to accept the discussion regarding scheduling a meeting with the MLA and MP, for information.

CARRIED

**Motion No. 23/08/15/278** 6.E.v – Alberta SW Meeting of August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023  
MOVED by Councillor Gardner to accept the discussion regarding the August Alberta SouthWest meeting, for information.

CARRIED

**Motion No. 23/08/15/279** 6.F.i – Discussion RE: Security for Cookhouse Building  
MOVED by Deputy Reeve Streeter to accept the discussion regarding security options for the cookhouse building, for information.

CARRIED

#### **IN-CAMERA**

**Motion No. 23/08/15/280** MOVED by Reeve Davis that, in accordance with Section 197 of the Municipal Government Act, Council moves into a closed meeting at 1:31 p.m. to discuss matters involving advice from officials, per section 24 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP)

CARRIED

**Motion No. 23/08/15/281** MOVED by Reeve Davis that Council return to an open meeting at 1:56 p.m.

CARRIED

#### **BUSINESS ARISING FROM IN-CAMERA**

**Motion No. 23/08/15/269** 8.A – Liaison Officer’s Report to Council.  
MOVED by Deputy Reeve Streeter to invite Northback Holdings Corporation to attend a MD of Ranchland Council meeting.

CARRIED

**Motion No. 23/08/15/270** MOVED by Councillor Gardner to accept the liaison officer’s report for information.

CARRIED

Kelly Starling joined the meeting at 1:58 p.m.  
Cpl. Thomas Nairn joined the meeting at 1:58 p.m.  
Cpl. Sean Dutch joined the meeting at 1:58 p.m.  
Cpl. (Act.) Christopher McKerracher joined the meeting at 1:58 p.m.  
Cpl. Thomas Nairn left the meeting at 2:33 p.m.  
Cpl. Sean Dutch left the meeting at 2:33 p.m.  
Cpl. (Act.) Christopher McKerracher left the meeting at 2:33 p.m.  
Kelly Starling left the meeting at 3:00 p.m.

**BUSINESS**

6.D.i – Kelly Starling, Director of Emergency Services  
6.D.ii – RCMP Delegation – Nanton, Claresholm, Crowsnest Pass  
Detachment commanders.

**Motion No. 23/08/15/271**

MOVED by Deputy Reeve Streeter to accept the RCMP and Director of Emergency Services delegations for information.

CARRIED

**ADJOURNMENT**

Being that the agenda matters have concluded, the Reeve declared the meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

These Minutes approved this 1<sup>st</sup> day of September, 2023.

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Ron Davis, Reeve

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Robert Strauss, Chief Administrative Officer

# BOARD REPORT



**CHINOOK**  
ARCH REGIONAL  
LIBRARY SYSTEM

Chinook Arch Library Board Meeting - August 3, 2023

## Summer Reading Program 2023!

The Chinook Arch Summer Reading Program is in full swing! SRP Coordinators Amy Kim and Tori Norlin have made nearly 40 visits to libraries to deliver their program. So far, 435 kids have attended. Thanks to Amy and Tori for a wonderful summer!



## Resource Sharing Agreement

Chinook Arch has a long-standing agreement with the City of Lethbridge Library Board that acknowledges the Lethbridge Public Library's contribution to the System through its collections, expertise, and resources. The agreement is reviewed by both parties every two years. No changes to the agreement are recommended by the Chinook Arch Library Board at this time.

# Board Members Present

Arrowwood  
 Barons  
 Cardston  
 Coutts  
 Crowsnest Pass  
 Fort Macleod  
 Hill Spring  
 Lethbridge (County)  
 Lomond  
 Magrath  
 Milk River  
 Nanton  
 Pincher Creek  
 Pincher Creek M.D.  
 Stavely  
 Taber M.D.  
 Vauxhall  
 Vulcan County  
 Ministerial Appointment

Corry Walk  
 Ron Gorzitz  
 Marsha Jensen  
 Stephen A. Pain  
 Doreen Glavin  
 Jim Monteith  
 Suzanne French  
 Tory Campbell  
 Marie Logan  
 Darryl Christensen  
 Anne Michaelis  
 Amanda Bustard  
 Mark Barber  
 Dave Cox  
 Chelsey Hurt  
 Tamara Miyanaga  
 Marilyn Forchuk  
 Doug Logan  
 Vic Mensch (Chair)

### Regrets

Claresholm  
 Coaldale  
 Picture Butte  
 Raymond  
 Stirling  
 Taber  
 Vulcan  
 Willow Creek M.D.  
 LPL Resource Centre

Kelsey Hipkin  
 Jordan Sailer  
 Teresa Feist  
 Kelly Jensen  
 Gary Bikman  
 Monica McLean  
 Debra Wyatt  
 Maryanne Sandberg  
 Brendan Cummins

### Absent

Barnwell  
 Cardston County  
 Carmangay  
 Champion  
 Coalhurst  
 Glenwood  
 Lethbridge (City)  
 Milo  
 Nobleford  
 Warner  
 Warner County  
 ID of Waterton

Jane Johnson  
 Tom Nish  
 Sarah Mitchell  
 Terry Penney  
 Lyndsay Montina  
 Linda Allred  
 Robin Harper  
 Christopher Northcott  
 Melissa Jensen  
 Derek Baron  
 Morgan Rockenbach  
 Lesley Little

# Thank You and Farewell to Lisa Weekes

Chinook Arch Associate Director Lisa Weekes has accepted a position at the UBC Okanagan Library. The Board would like to formally thank Lisa for her significant contributions to Chinook Arch. During her 5 years with the organization, she masterminded several successful programs, including the Digital Literacy Exchange Program (DLEP), the Seniors and Intergenerational Program, and many others. She also fundraised nearly \$1 million dollars to support these multi-year programs. Chinook Arch Board and staff wish Lisa well in her future endeavours.



# Policies Reviewed

The board reviewed and approved the following policies:

- Workplace Violence and Harassment
- Board Meetings
- Bylaws

## Contact Us

Chinook Arch Regional Library System  
 2902 7th Avenue North  
 Lethbridge, AB T1H 5C8 | 403-380-1500  
[www.chinookarch.ca](http://www.chinookarch.ca) | [arch@chinookarch.ca](mailto:arch@chinookarch.ca)



[facebook.com/chinook.arch7](https://facebook.com/chinook.arch7)



[@chinooklibs](https://@chinooklibs)



[@chinooklibs](https://@chinooklibs)



# Blowdown notification

## Blowdown details

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Land location: \_\_\_\_\_

TC Energy land agent: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Onsite technician (blowdown co-ordinator):  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cell number: \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated duration of blowdown: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

At TC Energy, the safety of the public and our employees is a top priority. To ensure our pipeline system continues to meet the highest safety standards, we periodically perform routine maintenance as part of our Pipeline Integrity Program. As part of this work, you may hear a sustained loud noise known as a “blowdown.”

A blowdown is the act of releasing natural gas from the pipeline system so work can be done safely on the depressurized facilities. TC Energy employees will close the required valves to isolate the facilities and then open a blowdown valve to safely depressurize in a controlled manner. A loud roaring sound may occur when the natural gas is released, although TC Energy may employ tools to minimize this noise whenever possible.



The sound during a blowdown can be as loud as an airplane engine and may last anywhere from a few minutes to multiple hours, depending on the amount of pipe being depressurized. As the flow of gas gradually slows down, the noise also lessens.

Note: During an in-line inspection, multiple blowdown events occur over the course of the project.

After the natural gas is released, a funnel-shaped air expeller is placed on top of the blowdown valve opening, which draws any remaining gas out and makes it safe for activities such as welding.

Once maintenance is complete, work begins to safely bring the line back into service. Natural gas is sent back into the pipeline and, once it reaches pressure, the blowdown valve is opened once again to vent the atmospheric air. Once all the air is removed, the blowdown valve is closed. The line is then pressurized to its normal operating pressure.

Blowdowns of different types occur regularly along our pipeline system, from long sections of large-diameter pipeline to above-ground compressor station maintenance. They are part of the safe maintenance and operation of our facilities. We recognize Blowdowns can be an inconvenience for our neighbours and we do everything we can to minimize the effects. Residents living in close proximity to the planned blowdown location will receive notification of the blowdown prior to the work beginning.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact TC Energy first.

### General inquiries

450 – 1 Street S.W. Calgary, AB  
Canada, T2P 5H1  
1-800-661-3805  
(weekdays 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. MST)

[cdn\\_landowner\\_help@TCEnergy.com](mailto:cdn_landowner_help@TCEnergy.com)

In case of a pipeline emergency, call:  
1-888-982-7222

[TCEnergy.com](https://www.tcenenergy.com)

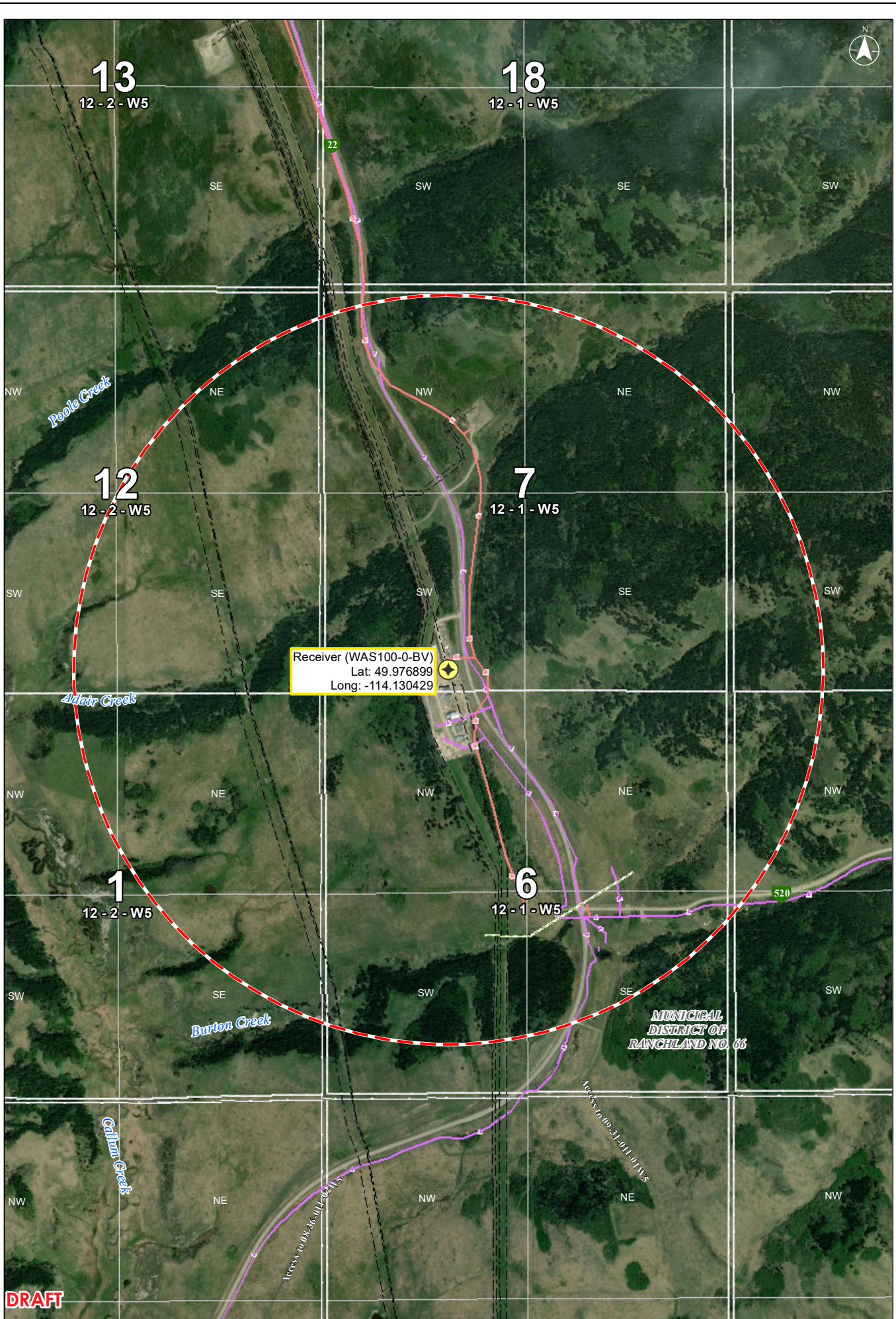
### Regulatory comment

*Depending on jurisdiction, TC Energy facilities are regulated by the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER), the Canada Energy Regulator (CER) or the BC Oil and Gas Commission (BCOGC).*

*The regulators work with TC Energy to ensure our pipelines are constructed, tested and operated safely. The regulators have employees available for inquiries and to assist or advise landowners and occupants regarding pipeline problems.*



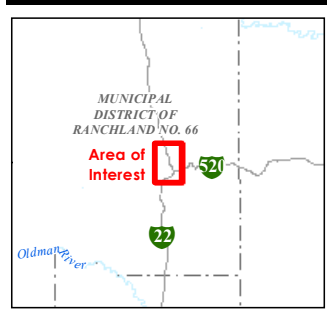




Receiver (WAS100-0-BV)  
 Lat: 49.976899  
 Long: -114.130429

MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF RANGLAND NO. 66

**DRAFT**



- Blowdown Site
- 1500m Residence Notification Buffer
- Fortis Powerline
- Low Pressure Gas
- Pipe - Buried
- Telus Line

0 250 500 metres  
 1:20,000 (at original document size of 8.5x14)



Client/Project: NOVA Gas Transmission Ltd. 2023-669\_002 REV 0  
 NPS 36 WAS Mainline PI-23-158 Prepared by RL on 2023-08-21 Reviewed by CL on 2023-08-21

Title: **Blowdown Residence Notification  
 WAS100-0-BV  
 Receiver**

**Notes**  
 1. Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 11N  
 2. Base data provided by AllGIS, CanVec, IHS  
 3. Imagery: DigitalGlobe Imagery Service provided by IHS  
 Disclaimer: Aim Land Services assumes no responsibility for data supplied in electronic format. The information contained herein is compiled from various government and industry sources, subject to copyright. Aim and its data suppliers provide no warranty regarding the accuracy or completeness of this information and assume no liability for the interpretation or use thereof.

**DRAFT**



**M.D. OF RANGLAND NO. 66  
REPORT TO COUNCIL  
Information Update (IU)**

**Title:** Budget Report – as of July 31, 2023

**Meeting Date:** September 05, 2023

**Originated By:** Robert Strauss, CAO

**Background:** A high-level summary of the monthly actuals to budget has been prepared in a format that we hope that Council finds intuitive and clear.

**Strategic Pillar:** 4. Financial Sustainability

**Options for Action:** 1.) Review the attached summary report and if satisfactory, then to accept for information.

**CAO's Review/  
Comments/:** The Budget Report will be presented at the meeting.

**Attachments:** Presented at meeting.



**M.D. of Ranchland No. 66**  
**Statement of Operations** (non-financial items are not included)  
**Report as of July 31, 2023**

Description	Actual	Annual Budget	Variance by %
<b>Non-Functionalized Revenue</b>			
Net Property Taxes	\$2,303,122	\$2,296,246	100
<b>Council/Legislative Services</b>			
Total Council/Legislative Operating Revenues	0	0	0
Council Remuneration; Travel & other	48,139	98,645	49
Council - Transfers to (Grants to)	2,000	2,400	83
Leg. Staff Pay & Benefits	96,602	158,433	61
Leg. - Legal/Audit and other Contracted Services	67,681	110,710	61
Leg. - Materials, Goods, Supplies and Other	0	1,000	0
Total Council/Legislative Operating Expenditures	214,422	371,188	58
<b>General Administration</b>			
Total General Administration Operating Revenues	43,922	22,934	192
Gen.Admin. Staff Pay & Benefits	162,423	264,354	61
Staff - Mileage, Training, Travel	21,121	34,700	61
Legal/Insurance/Assessor/Consultant costs	12,566	22,000	57
Information Technology (IT); Computer Software & Hardware; Website; Internet and Telephone costs	26,220	64,950	40
Admin. Bldg. Operational, Maint. & Repair costs	15,856	36,500	43
Health & Safety costs	128	2,200	6
GA - Other Contracted Services	6,823	14,750	46
GA - Other Materials, Goods, Supplies	4,291	7,000	61
Total General Administration Operating Expenditures	249,428	446,454	56
<b>Fiscal Services</b>			
Net Fiscal Services Revenue	67,066	112,900	59
<b>Policing</b>			
Fine Revenue (CPO issued tickets)	1,537	6,500	24
RCMP Policing cost share agreement with GOA	5,187	23,350	22
CPO costs	40,796	85,000	48
Total Policing Operating Expenditures	45,983	108,350	42
<b>Fire Protection</b>			
Total Fire Protection Operating Revenues	10,000	0	-
Total Fire Protection Operating Expenditures	27,623	43,670	63
<b>Other Protection Services</b> (Disaster, Ambulance & First Aid)			
Total Other Protection Services Revenue	0	0	0
Total Other Protection Services Expenditures	30,236	68,823	44

Description	Actual	Annual Budget	Variance by %
<b>Transportation Services</b>			
Operating Grants	66,270	266,270	25
Shop Lease Revenue (from V.S.)	26,887	42,995	63
Revenue from Road Use Agreements	10,800	200,000	5
Revenue from Custom Equipment Work	75,210	75,000	100
Other Revenue of Transportation Services	5,333	6,200	86
Total Transportation Services Revenue	184,500	590,465	31
<b>Transportation - Staff Pay &amp; Benefits</b>			
Transportation - Staff Pay & Benefits	289,071	451,700	64
Staff - Mileage, Training, Travel	1,252	3,200	39
Legal/Insurance/Engineering Consultant costs	51,026	242,000	21
Information Technology (IT); Computer Hardware; Internet and Telephone costs	3,991	9,200	43
Public Works Shop/Yard - Operational, Maint. & Repair costs	12,190	40,850	30
Health & Safety costs	405	2,500	16
<b>Gravel Program</b>			
Contract Hauling costs	125,077	150,360	83
Gravel Consumption	74,799	0	-
Gravel Consumption drawn from Inventory	-74,799	0	-
Gravel Crushing (to increase Inventory)	0	0	0
Cattle Guard/Dust Control/Small Culvert costs	20,315	50,500	40
H.E. & Vehicle Maint. & Repair and wear edges	34,625	48,000	72
Fuels & DEF	64,268	115,250	56
TS - Other Contracted Services	18,005	23,200	78
TS - Other Materials, Goods, Supplies	11,754	88,700	13
Total Transportation Operating Expenditures	631,979	1,225,460	52
<b>Waste Management Services</b>			
Total Waste Management Operating Expenditures	2,352	5,765	41
<b>Public Health and Welfare Services</b>			
Total Public Health & Welfare Services Revenue	2,277	2,969	77
Total Public Health & Welfare Services Expenditures	5,214	5,212	100
<b>Planning &amp; Development Services</b>			
Total Planning & Development Services Revenue	491	200	245
Total Planning & Development Services Expenditures	25,669	36,738	70
<b>Economic Development Services</b>			
Total Economic Development Services Expenditures	0	100	0
<b>Agriculture Support Services</b>			
Operating Grants	181,247	115,000	158
Weed Control Sales	22,694	121,000	19
Program Partnership Funding received	5,750	0	-
Deadstock Recycle Program Grant Earned	3,777	5,000	76
Other Revenue	1,159	3,000	39
Total Agriculture Support Services Revenues	214,627	244,000	88

Description	Actual	Annual Budget	Variance by %
Agriculture Service Board Expenses	12,870	38,300	34
Ag. Legislative Programming			
Staff Pay & Benefits	222,722	329,115	68
Other Ag. Legislative costs (excluding Pesticide activity)	57,722	226,460	25
Producer Weed Control Assistance Program	0	15,500	0
Pesticide Activity			
Pesticide Consumption	0	17,000	0
Pesticide Consumption drawn from Inventory	0	-17,000	0
Pesticide Purchases (to increase inventory)	5,000	17,000	29
Ag. Environmental Programming			
Staff Pay & Benefits	22,391	34,708	65
Other Ag. Environmental costs	3,614	10,980	33
Deadstock Recycle Program Payments	3,777	5,000	76
Riparian Assistance Program Payments	0	4,500	0
Other Agriculture Support Services Expenses	2,544	8,675	29
Total Agriculture Support Services Expenditures	330,640	690,238	47

### Park Maint. Contract

Total Revenue from Park Maintenance Contract	582	164,070	<1
Total Expenditures of Park Maintenance Contract	13,596	154,582	9

### Parks, Library, RCEC, Recreation

Total Revenue from Parks, RCEC etc.	0	0	0
Total Expenditures from Parks, RCEC, Library etc.	1,409	3,140	45

Description	Actual	Annual Budget	Variance by %
<b>Summary</b>			
<b>Operating Revenues</b>			
Net Municipal Property Tax Revenue	2,303,122	2,296,246	100
Total Council & Other Legislative Service Revenues	0	0	0
Total General Administration Service Revenues	43,922	22,934	192
Net Fiscal Services Revenue	67,066	112,900	59
Total Policing Services Revenue	1,537	6,500	24
Total Fire Protection Services Revenue	10,000	0	-
Total Other Protection Service Revenues	0	0	0
Total Transportation Service Revenues	184,500	590,465	31
Total Public Health & Welfare Service Revenues	2,277	2,969	77
Total Planning & Development Service Revenues	491	200	245
Total Agriculture Support Services Revenue	214,627	244,000	88
Total Park Maintenance Contract Revenues	582	164,070	<1
Total RCEC & Other Recreation Services Revenue	0	0	0
Grand Total for Operating Revenues	2,828,124	3,440,284	82
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>			
Total Council & Other Legislative Services	214,422	371,188	58
Total General Administration Services	249,428	446,454	56
Total Policing Services Expenditures	45,983	108,350	42
Total Fire Protection Services Expenditures	27,623	43,670	63
Total Other Protective Services Expenditures	30,236	68,823	44
Total Transportation Service Expenditures	631,979	1,225,460	52
Total Waste Management Services Expenditures	2,352	5,765	41
Total Public Health & Welfare Service Expenditures	5,214	5,212	100
Total Planning & Development Service Expenditures	25,669	36,738	70
Total Economic Development Services Expenditures	0	100	0
Total Agriculture Support Services Expenditures	330,640	690,238	47
Total Park Maintenance Contract Expenditures	13,596	154,582	9
Total RCEC & Other Recreation Services Expenditures	1,409	3,140	45
Grand Total for Operating Expenditures	1,578,551	3,159,720	50
<b>Excess or (Deficiency) of Operating Revenues Over Operating Expenditures</b>	<b>\$1,249,573</b>	<b>\$280,564</b>	<b>445</b>

Description	Actual	Annual Budget	Variance by %
<b>Capital Activity</b>			
<b>Capital Funding Sources</b>			
MSI Capital Grant for Admin Bldg. Modernization Project		235,000	
Transfer from Capital Reserves for Admin Bldg. Modernization Project		10,000	
MSI Capital Grant for Wobbly Packer (Grader attachment)		36,000	
Transfer from Capital Reserves for Wheel Loader (insurance proceeds)	350,000	350,000	100
Transfer from Capital Reserves for Wheel Loader	4,000	4,000	100
Roads - Proceeds from sale of 2014 GMC 2500 Pick-up Truck	26,450	15,000	176
Roads - Transfer from Capital Reserves for New Pick-up Truck		70,000	
Roads - Proceeds from trade-in of Dynaweld deck trailer (semi)	35,000	30,000	117
Roads - MSI Capital Grant for new PW deck trailer (semi)	73,318	60,000	122
Ag - Transfer from Fleet Reserve for new Pick-up truck		60,000	
Ag - Transfer from Capital Reserve for new Pick-up truck		5,000	
Ag - Transfer from Capital Reserve for new Cargo trailer (for weeds)		10,000	
<b>Total Capital Funding Sources</b>	<b>488,768</b>	<b>885,000</b>	<b>55</b>

<b>Capital Acquisitions</b>			
Administration Building Modernization	1,158	245,000	<1
Roads - Wobbly Packer (Grader attachment)		36,000	
Roads - Wheel Loader	354,000	354,000	100
Roads - New Pick-up Truck (Ford F-250)	84,692	85,000	99
Roads - New PW Gincor deck trailer (semi)	108,318	90,000	120
Ag. Dept. - Pick-up Truck (Toyota)	62,952	65,000	97
Ag. Dept. - new Cargo trailer (for weeds) *** moved to operating budget		0	
<b>Total Capital Acquisitions</b>	<b>611,120</b>	<b>875,000</b>	<b>70</b>

**M.D. OF RANGLAND NO. 66**  
**REPORT TO COUNCIL**  
**Information Update (IU)**

**Title:**                    **2024 Municipal Operating and Capital Budget**

**Meeting Date:**            September 5, 2023

**Originated By:**           **Robert Strauss, CAO**

**Background:**            Pursuant to the Council Approved Budget Policy the following is the proposed schedule for the approval of the 2024 Municipal Budget:

September 2023 – Meetings with Staff, Department Heads to initiate the development of the 2024 Municipal Budget. Any external organizations requesting funding shall be encouraged to submit their budget requests.

October 3<sup>rd</sup> – Review of ASB Preliminary Budget Concepts and Assumptions (not detailed financial) with the Agriculture Service Board.

October 3<sup>rd</sup> - Review of ASB Preliminary Budget Concepts and Assumptions (not detailed financial) with Council.

November 14<sup>th</sup> - Presentation of 1<sup>st</sup> detailed draft of the 2024 budget to Council.

November 28<sup>th</sup> – Presentation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> detailed draft of the 2024 budget to Council.

December 12<sup>th</sup> – Presentation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final detailed draft 2024 budget (if necessary) to Council.

**Strategic Pillar:**

1. Environmental Stewardship
2. Infrastructure and Service Delivery
- 3: Public Safety & Emergency Services
4. Financial Sustainability
- 5: Collaborative Partnership
- 6: Community

**Options for Action:**

- 1.) Accept the 2024 Municipal Budget Schedule as presented.
- 2.) Amend the 2024 Municipal Budget Schedule as presented.

**CAO's Review/  
Comments/:**

This schedule helps create the financial foundation for the operations of the MD of Ranchland for the 2024 fiscal year.

**Attachments:**

None

**M.D. OF RANGLAND NO. 66  
REPORT TO COUNCIL  
Information Update (IU)**

**Title:** **AER Community Engagement Event**

**Meeting Date:** September 5, 2023

**Originated By:** **Robert Strauss, CAO**

**Background:** The AER is hosting workshops / meetings on “rock-hosting minerals”.

*The schedules for the meetings in southern Alberta are as follows:*

***Locations:***

***Each event will include a two-hour engagement session followed by a lunch or reception with our minerals team.***

***Crowsnest Pass, Country Encounters Hospitality***

***September 7, 10:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.***

***Pincher Creek, Heritage Inn Hotel & Convention Centre***

***September 7, 7:00-9:30 p.m.***

**Benefits:** An opportunity to receive additional insight into the workings of the AER as it relates to its decision making and regulatory process for the development of rock-hosted minerals.

**Disadvantages:** None, other than the time and minor expense to attend.

**Strategic Pillar:**

1. Environmental Stewardship
2. Infrastructure and Service Delivery
3. Public Safety & Emergency Services
4. Financial Sustainability
5. Collaborative Partnership
6. Community

**Options for Action:** 1.) Make plans to have representation at some of these workshops.

**Financial Considerations:** None that are significant



**CAO's Review/  
Comments/:**

Given the MD of Ranchland's position on coal exploration, it may be prudent to gain a greater understanding of the regulatory process as it relates to "rock-hosted minerals".

**Attachments:**

Email notification of the Workshops

## Nikki Funk

---

**From:** Robert Strauss  
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 23, 2023 3:28 PM  
**To:** Nikki Funk  
**Subject:** FW: Registration is open: Let's talk minerals!  
**Attachments:** Minerals Resource Development\_Handout.pdf

Hi Nikki,

Can you put this on the next Council agenda under 6.E (i) along with the email

Thanks,

Robert Strauss  
Chief Administrative Officer  
M.D. of Ranchland No. 66  
P.O. Box 1060, Nanton, AB  
T0L 1R0  
Email: (cao@ranchland66.com)  
403-646-3131 (work)  
403-646-3141 (Fax)

---

**From:** Minerals <Minerals@aer.ca>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 23, 2023 12:38 PM  
**Subject:** Registration is open: Let's talk minerals!

Spots are still available to participate in our in-person workshops on rock-hosted minerals. See below for details and to register.

We'd love to see you there!

---

**From:** Minerals  
**Sent:** Monday, August 14, 2023 1:35 PM  
**Subject:** AER community engagement event: Let's talk minerals!



Let's have a conversation about the future of minerals regulation in Alberta.

Registration is open for our public, in-person workshops on rock-hosted minerals.

Feedback collected from these discussions will inform the regulations overseeing the development of rock-hosted minerals (see attachment to learn more).

The Alberta Geological Survey will also be present to discuss where minerals are located in Alberta and to share information on public geoscience resources.

### **Workshop details**

We have chosen engagement sites based in part on known mineral deposit locations. Please register for the event that best suits your needs.

Locations:

Each event will include a two-hour engagement session followed by a lunch or reception with our minerals team.

**Crowsnest Pass**, Country Encounters Hospitality

September 7, 10:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

**Pincher Creek**, Heritage Inn Hotel & Convention Centre

September 7, 7:00-9:30 p.m.

**Grande Prairie**, Holiday Inn & Suites Grande Prairie - Conference Center

September 12, 10:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

**Slave Lake**, Slave Lake Inn & Conference Centre

September 13, 10:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

**Fort McMurray**, MacDonald Island Park

September 14, 7:00-9:30 p.m.

### **[REGISTER HERE](#)**

Registration is mandatory for this event; however, registration is open until the event starts.

If you cannot join us in person, please share your ideas, concerns, and questions via the [minerals@aer.ca](mailto:minerals@aer.ca) inbox or during the public feedback period in the fall.

### **Background:**

The community events build on a series of engagements informing the regulation of mineral development in Alberta. We strongly encourage participants to review the [recording](#) from the previous information session on rock-hosted minerals.

So far, we've heard input through:

- Two virtual information sessions with Indigenous communities and groups and the public
- Two virtual workshops with existing mineral operators and new/potential mineral operators
- Post-event surveys
- The [minerals@aer.ca](mailto:minerals@aer.ca) inbox
- Attendance at conferences and events throughout 2022/2023
- Previously held mineral engagement events supporting the regulation of brine-hosted minerals in 2022
- The Government of Alberta led engagement events supporting the [Minerals Strategy and Action Plan](#) and [Mineral Resource Development Act \(MRDA\)](#)

Do you know someone who might be interested in these events? Follow the links to share this with your [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), or [Facebook](#) networks.

Regards,  
Minerals Strategy and Implementation Team

This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error please notify the system manager. This message contains confidential information and is intended only for the individual named. If you are not the named addressee you should not disseminate, distribute or copy this e-mail.

Mineral resource development is part of the Government of Alberta’s strategy to diversify the energy and resource sector. As such, the Government of Alberta is expanding the Alberta Energy Regulator’s (AER) mandate to include the regulation of minerals. Once fully proclaimed into law, the Mineral Resource Development Act (MRDA) will establish the AER as the life-cycle regulator for the province’s mineral resources. Historically, several regulators oversaw mineral development. The transfer of this oversight to a single regulatory authority will promote the safe, efficient, orderly, and environmentally responsible development of mineral resources from the application stage to reclamation and closure.

### Why are we regulating minerals?

The Government of Alberta wants to capitalize on the province’s mineral potential and become a preferred international producer and supplier of minerals and mineral products while promoting resource conservation, environmental protection, and public safety.

Many different minerals, including rare earth elements, can be found throughout Alberta. They can be used in batteries, portable devices, TVs, toothpaste, buildings, eyeglasses, computers, vehicles, hospital equipment, and many other daily-use items.

### What minerals will the AER regulate?

According to the *MRDA*, AER-regulated minerals will include most metallic and industrial minerals, including lithium, limestone, uranium, iron, zinc, lead, gold, diamonds, silver, and rare earth elements, to name a few. To support the engagement period, we have categorized minerals as either brine-hosted or rock-hosted minerals.

1. Brine-hosted minerals are typically found in underground salt water and are mostly extracted using wells. Mineral extraction from brines will look like a traditional well operation on the landscape.

Update: After a series of engagements in 2022 and the partial proclamation of the *MRDA*, the AER became the life-cycle regulator of brine-hosted minerals in March 2023.



2. Rock-hosted minerals are mined using traditional mining or quarrying techniques and will look similar to other surface or underground mining operations on the landscape. However, minerals can be extracted from the rock by dissolving them in place (i.e., in situ) and processing them on the surface. In situ extraction involves minimal ground disturbance.

Update: The AER will start engagement on the rock-hosted phase of mineral resource development in July 2023. These engagements will inform future regulatory requirements before the *MRDA* is fully proclaimed.



### Rare earth minerals are used for ingredients in:



Batteries



Toothpaste



Glasses



Portable devices



Vehicles



Hospital equipment

Find out more at [aer.ca](https://aer.ca).





**M.D. OF RANCHLAND NO. 66  
REPORT TO COUNCIL  
Request For Descision (RFD)**

**Title:**                   **Public Notice Bylaw**

**Meeting Date:**       **September 5, 2023**

**Originated By:**       **Robert Strauss, CAO**

**Background:**       In order that the MD of Ranchland can reduce advertising costs and streamline the public notification requirements under provincial legislation, administration is presenting the attached draft bylaw in order facilitate this change.

Essentially this bylaw would allow the MD of Ranchland to legally designate the MD of Ranchland website as the official location for all legally required notifications to the public. The MD would still have the option to run additional advertising through traditional media (local newspapers, etc.), but would not have to rely on the actual physical ads to be compliant with provincial legislation.

The MD explored this concept previously in 2022 and got so far as to pass an initial first ready to Bylaw 2201. However, we encountered some scheduling issues as well as some clarification matters which took longer than expected. Consequently, it would be cleaner from an administrative perspective to rescind Resolution# 74/22/03/22 (Bylaw 2022-01- First reading) and simply start fresh with a new Bylaw (Bylaw 2023-05) in order to proceed with this initiative.

Council opted to start a new Bylaw (2023-05). The required advertising has occurred in order to proceed to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> reading of the bylaw.

- Benefits:**
- 1.) This bylaw would remove uncertainty as to whether newspapers accurately run the MD's notifications correctly.
  - 2.) The MD is not restricted from running additional notifications in newspapers and other forms of media, if the MD decides it beneficial to do so.
  - 3.) There could be significant financial savings for not running some newspaper notifications that the MD deems sufficient if run on the website.

**Disadvantages:** None that are readily apparent

**Strategic Pillar:**  
6: Community

**Options for Action:** 1.) Give 2nd and 3rd reading to Bylaw 2023-05

**Financial Considerations:** Cost savings from reduction in newsprint/ online advertisement.

**CAO's Review/ Comments/:** I believe that this bylaw would be a benefit in terms of efficiency and cost savings. It would also reduce the potential for third-party typographical errors that happen periodically when notifications are set to newsprint.

Given recent events that have resulted in the discontinuance of print media, in favour of digital local newspapers only, the move to this bylaw is rather timely.

I would recommend that Bylaw 2023-05 be considered for 2nd and 3rd reading.

**Attachments:** Bylaw No. 2023-05 (with first reading)



# M.D. OF RANCLAND No. 66

IN THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA  
BYLAW 2023 ♦ 05



## PUBLIC NOTIFICATION BYLAW

A BYLAW OF THE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF RANCLAND IN THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA TO ESTABLISH ALTERNATIVE METHODS TO ADVERTISE STATUTORY NOTICES AND PROVIDE PUBLIC NOTIFICATION.

Whereas the Municipal Government Act being Chapter M-26, Revised Statutes of Alberta, 2000 and amendments thereto, requires that a Municipality advertise bylaws, resolutions, meetings, public hearings, and other things in accordance with Section 606.1 of the Municipal Government Act and other Provincial Legislation; and

Whereas pursuant to the Municipal Government Act, Section 606.1(1) a Council of a Municipality may pass a Bylaw to provide for one or more methods, which may include electronic means, for advertising proposed bylaws, resolutions, meetings, public hearings, and other things referred to in Section 606 of the Municipal Government Act; and

Whereas the Council of the Municipal District of Ranchland No.66 wishes to establish alternative methods to provide notice to the public of bylaws, resolutions, meetings public hearings and other things as required by the Municipal Government Act and is satisfied that these alternative methods would bring to the attention of substantially all residents in the area to which the item relates.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT: The Municipal District of Ranchland No. 66, duly assembled, enacts as follows:

### 1.SHORT TITLE:

1.1 This bylaw may be cited as the "Public Notification Bylaw".

### 2.DEFINITIONS:

2.1 In this Bylaw the following definitions will apply:



A.) **“M.D. of Ranchland”** – shall mean the corporate body identified as the Municipal District of Ranchland No.66 as registered as a municipal government in the Province of Alberta.

B.) **“Municipal Government Act”** – shall mean the Municipal Government Act, RSA 2000 in the Province of Alberta.

C.) **“Statutory Notices”** – shall mean those notices and/or advertisements including those proposed bylaws, resolutions, meetings, public hearings, and other items as required to be advertised in accordance with the Municipal Government Act or other Provincial or Federal legislation directing municipalities in the Province of Alberta.

### **3. GENERAL PROVISIONS**

**3.1** The M.D. of Ranchland will advertise Statutory Notices by publishing those Statutory Notices on the M.D. of Ranchland corporate website with those timelines as stipulated by the Municipal Government Act and the corporate website will be the official venue for such publications of Statutory Notices.

**3.2** In addition to the mandatory publishing of statutory notices identified in Section 3.1, the M.D. of Ranchland may choose to advertise Statutory Notices as a non-official/ for information purposes only purpose, via the following means:

- a.) A newspaper or newspapers, including online and/or print versions, commonly circulated in the region and/or;
- b.) Official M.D. of Ranchland social media accounts and/or;
- c.) Posting of Notices at the M.D. of Ranchland administration offices in such places having prominent exposure to the general public. and/or;
- d.) A notice mailed or delivered to every residence in the area to which the proposed bylaw, resolution, or other thing pertains to, or in which the meeting is to be held and/or;
- e.) Other means determined appropriate by the M.D. of Ranchland.

**3.3** Nothing in this Bylaw shall be deemed to govern the ability of the M.D. of Ranchland to advertise, publish notices, or otherwise communicate on any other item or issue not considered to be a Statutory Notice.

**4.SEVERABILITY**

4.1 Each Provision of this Bylaw is independent of all other provisions in this Bylaw. If any such provision is declared invalid by a Court of competent jurisdiction, all other provisions of this Bylaw will remain valid and enforceable.

**5. EFFECTIVE DATE**

5.1 This Bylaw is passed at such time as it has received 3<sup>rd</sup> reading and is signed in accordance with the Provisions of the Municipal Government Act. This Bylaw shall come into force at the beginning of the day that it has successfully received 3<sup>rd</sup> reading.

Read a first time this 6<sup>th</sup> day of June . A.D. 2023

Read a second time this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ . A.D. 2023

Read a third time this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ . A.D. 2023



Reeve



Chief Administrative Officer

**M.D. OF RANGLAND NO. 66  
REPORT TO COUNCIL  
Request for Guidance (RFG)**

<b><u>Title:</u></b>	<b>Potential Meeting with local MLA and local MP</b>
<b><u>Meeting Date:</u></b>	<b>August 15, 2023</b>
<b><u>Originated By:</u></b>	<b>Robert Strauss, CAO</b>
<b><u>Background:</u></b>	<p>As was informally discussed, inviting the MLA and MP to separate meetings with Council to share information and establish working relationships may be a prudent course of action.</p> <p>Administration received input from Council at the previous Council meeting to pursue separate meetings with the local MLA and local MP.</p>
<b><u>Benefits:</u></b>	Promote communication and establish working relationships.
<b><u>Disadvantages:</u></b>	None
<b><u>Strategic Pillar:</u></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Environmental Stewardship</li><li>2. Infrastructure and Service Delivery</li><li>3. Public Safety &amp; Emergency Services</li><li>4. Financial Sustainability</li><li>5. Collaborative Partnership</li><li>6. Community</li></ol>
<b><u>Options for Action:</u></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.) Provide input to administration in order to facilitate these meetings.</li><li>2.) Do not proceed at this time.</li></ol>
<b><u>Financial Considerations:</u></b>	Perhaps minor hosting costs
<b><u>CAO's Review/ Comments/:</u></b>	I will update Council on the progress of the above discussed potential meetings with the MLA and MP.
<b><u>Attachments:</u></b>	None

**M.D. OF RANCHLAND NO. 66  
REPORT TO COUNCIL  
Information Update (IU)**

<b><u>Title:</u></b>	<b>Meetings Provincial Minister of Environment</b>
<b><u>Meeting Date:</u></b>	September 5, 2023
<b><u>Originated By:</u></b>	<b>Robert Strauss, CAO</b>
<b><u>Background:</u></b>	<p>Since the last meeting I have had discussions with both CAO's from the MD of Willow Creek and the MD of Pincher Creek with the aim to organizing joint meetings with all three MD's and the Ministers of Environment.</p> <p>Discussion to formulate formalize the various topics of discussion the 3 municipalities wish to discuss with the Minister. The MD of Ranchland can have this discussion about the topics that it wishes to raise at the meeting and then these points can be shared with the other 2 Municipal Districts.</p>
<b><u>Benefits:</u></b>	By approaching this as a joint meeting involving 3 municipal districts it may provide the delegation with more "weight" when meeting with the Minister of Environment.
<b><u>Disadvantages:</u></b>	Providing that none of the 3 Municipal Districts have contradictory positions, I see no disadvantages.
<b><u>Strategic Pillar:</u></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Environmental Stewardship</li><li>2. Infrastructure and Service Delivery</li><li>3: Public Safety &amp; Emergency Services</li><li>4. Financial Sustainability</li><li>5: Collaborative Partnership</li><li>6: Community</li></ol>
<b><u>Options for Action:</u></b>	1.) Move this issue forward by deciding on what topics are important to the Municipal District of Ranchland for the joint meeting.
<b><u>Financial Considerations:</u></b>	None that are significant, other than some admin. time and some travel.

**CAO's Review/  
Comments/:**

I believe this is an effective approach to meeting with the Minister of Environment.

**Attachments:**

None.

**M.D. OF RANCHLAND NO. 66  
REPORT TO COUNCIL  
Information Update (IU)**

**Title:** **Meetings Provincial Minister of Health/ Associate  
Minster of Health**

**Meeting Date:** September 5, 2023

**Originated By:** **Robert Strauss, CAO**

**Background:** Discussion has occurred at the Nanton Community Health Center Committee regarding efforts to help support the development of the Nanton Community Health Centre

It has been discussed that perhaps both the Town of Nanton and both Municipal Districts of Ranchland and Willow Creek may wish to schedule meetings with the respective Health Minister at both the AM and RMA Conventions this fall and winter.

**Strategic Pillar:**

- 2. Infrastructure and Service Delivery
- 3: Public Safety & Emergency Services
- 4. Financial Sustainability
- 5: Collaborative Partnership
- 6: Community

**Options for Action:** 1.) Determine if Council wishes to work with the MD of Willow Creek to schedule a meeting at the Fall RMA Convention, with the appropriate Health Minister

**Financial  
Considerations:**

None that are significant, other than some admin. time and some travel.

**CAO's Review/  
Comments/:**

I believe this is an effective approach to meeting with the Minister of Health.

**Attachments:**

None.

**M.D. OF RANCHLAND NO. 66  
REPORT TO COUNCIL  
Information Update (IU)**

**Title:**                   **Foothills Little Bow Municipal Association**

**Meeting Date:**           September 5, 2023

**Originated By:**           **Robert Strauss, CAO**

**Background:**           It was discussed as correspondence item at the previous Council meeting, the Fall meeting of the Foothills Little Bow Municipal Association (FLBMA) is scheduled for September 15, 2023, at the Coast Hotel in Lethbridge.

Should Council members wish to attend, the deadline to RSVP would be September 11<sup>th</sup> for catering purposes.

**Strategic Pillar:**           1. Environmental Stewardship  
                                  2. Infrastructure and Service Delivery  
                                  3: Public Safety & Emergency Services  
                                  4. Financial Sustainability  
                                  5: Collaborative Partnership  
                                  6: Community

**Options for Action:**    1.) Accept for information

**Financial Considerations:**    No direct costs.

**CAO's Review/ Comments/:**       As per background

**Attachments:**           None

**M.D. OF RANGLAND NO. 66  
REPORT TO COUNCIL  
Information Update (IU)**

<b><u>Title:</u></b>	<b>RMA's Report of FCSS</b>
<b><u>Meeting Date:</u></b>	September 5, 2023
<b><u>Originated By:</u></b>	<b>Robert Strauss, CAO</b>
<b><u>Background:</u></b>	This RMA Report discusses the Challenges facing rural FCSS programs in Alberta and proposes 4 policy recommendations
<b><u>Strategic Pillar:</u></b>	3: Public Safety & Emergency Services 4. Financial Sustainability 5: Collaborative Partnership 6: Community
<b><u>Options for Action:</u></b>	1.) As this is an information item, to accept for information unless Council has specific action they wish to pursue as a result of the report.
<b><u>CAO's Review/ Comments/:</u></b>	This is an information item, unless further action is initiated, accept for information.
<b><u>Attachments:</u></b>	<b><i>RMA FCSS Report – Understanding and Responding to the Challenges Faced by FCSS Programs in Rural Alberta</i></b>





A Report Prepared for the Rural Municipalities of Alberta by the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities at the University of Alberta

# Understanding and Responding to the Challenges Faced by FCSS Programs in Rural Alberta

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## Authors

**Clark Banack, PhD**  
*Director, Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities*  
University of Alberta

**Laticia Chapman, PhD Candidate**  
*Senior Research Associate, Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities*  
University of Alberta

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## \* ABOUT THE ALBERTA CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC), located at the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta in Camrose, has, since its founding in 2009, assisted rural communities in meeting diverse challenges across many areas of public policy through fostering constructive dialogue, promoting interdisciplinary and collaborative research, and developing partnerships. The ACSRC's mission is to link the research, outreach, and educational capacity of the University of Alberta with students, researchers, rural communities, rural community organizations, and policy makers at multiple levels across the province, nationally, and internationally in order to support the improved sustainability of rural communities and populations.

Thinking respectfully and reciprocally with, not just for, rural communities is a main objective of the ACSRC. Through dialogue and collaboration, the ACSRC operates an outreach program that provides direction and stimulates innovation in the development of rural communities. This is built around various collaborations with educational institutions, municipalities, and not-for-profit organizations on research projects that seek to create resilient rural communities across Alberta.

Recently, the ACSRC has been engaged in rural-focused projects related to substantiable economic development opportunities, community mental health, the delivery of social services, enhancing inclusivity, advancing the transition to renewable energy, aiding municipal collaboration, and better understanding both rural public opinion and rural-based populism. To read more about the ACSRC and the work it does, please visit: [www.acsrc.ca](http://www.acsrc.ca).

## \* ABOUT THE RURAL MUNICIPALITIES OF ALBERTA (RMA) & THE PROJECT

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocates on behalf of Alberta's rural municipalities. The RMA's members consist of 63 municipal districts and counties, five specialized municipalities, and the Special Areas Board. The RMA's 69 members have several common traits: large land masses, small populations, and a lack of a traditional "population centre." RMA members provide municipal governance to approximately 85% of Alberta's land mass; Alberta is unique in Canada in that municipalities govern land throughout the entire province, from border to border.

Because Alberta's rural municipalities provide municipal governance to large, sparsely populated, and often isolated areas, efficient and high-quality delivery of municipal services is an ongoing challenge that often requires innovative solutions and partnerships with neighbouring towns and villages. It also means that provincial services readily available in urban areas are limited or inaccessible to rural residents, especially those without access to a personal vehicle.

For several years, the RMA has heard from members that reductions in provincial social service availability in rural communities combined with stagnation in provincial funding for municipally-operated family and community support services (FCSS) has led to unprecedented pressure on FCSS agencies to act as a catch-all for a range of social needs in rural communities, including many beyond their mandates. Similar pressure has been put on rural municipalities to contribute funding to FCSS services well beyond their formal requirement under the *Family and Community Support Services Act*.

As social challenges are often overlooked and under-reported in rural Alberta, the RMA prioritized the need to "dig deeper" on this issue to determine whether these concerns were as serious as members described, and whether they were widespread across the province. The work undertaken by the ACSRC provides some powerful evidence as to the reality of this issue in rural Alberta and will allow the RMA to continue to advocate for improved delivery of provincial social services and adequate funding of FCSS programs in rural communities.



# \* EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Family and community support service (FCSS) programs have provided vitally important “preventative” social service programming to vulnerable Albertans for several decades. FCSS programs remain a critical staple of community life in rural Alberta in particular, often existing as the “only place in town” for rural Albertans in need to seek assistance face-to-face. However, these rural-based programs are facing increasing pressures that are negatively impacting their capacity to serve those in need. This report highlights three key challenges faced by rural FCSS programs in Alberta and responds with four policy recommendations.

## Key Challenges

### 1. Insufficient Provincial Funding

FCSS program costs have been rapidly increasing in the past five years, placing significant stress on their operations. Government of Alberta (GOA) funding (meant to equate to 80% of FCSS’s core funding) has remained largely stagnant since 2015. The majority of rural FCSS offices are increasingly reliant on municipal contributions well above their required twenty percent. However, rural municipalities do not have unlimited budgets, and are only able to make up so much of the shortfall created by the province refusing to meaningfully increase FCSS funding.

### 2. The Increasing Inaccessibility of Provincial Social Services in Rural Alberta

The ongoing centralization of social support services in Alberta has generated challenges for rural FCSS programs; challenges that have only multiplied with recent GOA decisions to transition to “1-800” intake lines and online web portals for several social service supports. As rural FCSS offices are often “the only shop in town,” they face a disproportionate burden compared to most of their urban counterparts, as more and more community members approach FCSS offices for help. This places additional pressure on rural FCSS offices to go beyond their mandate and provide intervention-type services, incurring the extra cost this entails with no hope of being reimbursed.

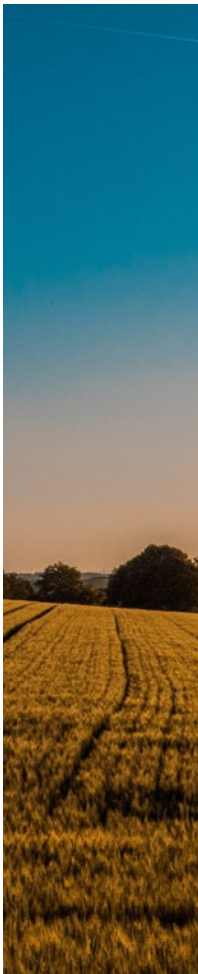
### 3. Changing and Increasing Social Needs in Rural Communities

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent period of inflation, FCSS programs across rural Alberta are encountering far more community members with more complex social needs than ever before. The number of people who are walking through the doors of rural FCSS offices in crisis has increased dramatically in the past few years, placing additional burdens on these offices to provide intervention-type services and incur the extra cost and effort this entails with no hope of being reimbursed.

## Policy Recommendations:

1. Increase core funding from the Government of Alberta.
2. Increase the accessibility of provincial social support services for rural Albertans.
3. Ensure that future public policy related to social service delivery in Alberta is approached via a rural lens.
4. Ensure that social service policy in Alberta is designed with meaningful contributions from rural FCSS programs.





## \* SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Family and community support service (FCSS) programs provide effective and vitally important “preventative” social service programming to vulnerable community members of all ages throughout Alberta. In an era of ongoing centralization of social service supports in the province, FCSS programs remain a staple of rural community life, often existing as the only physical location where rural Albertans in need can seek assistance face-to-face. These offices are staffed with hardworking and caring individuals who go above and beyond in serving their communities.

However, these rural-based programs are facing increasing pressures related to stagnant provincial funding, the centralization of provincial social service supports, and enhanced social challenges faced by vulnerable community members in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent period of rapid inflation. These challenges are pushing many rural FCSS programs to the brink, negatively affecting some of the most vulnerable members of rural communities and placing pressure on rural municipalities to shoulder an ever-increasing share of the costs of FCSS programming — a share that is now routinely in excess of the 20% mandated by provincial legislation.

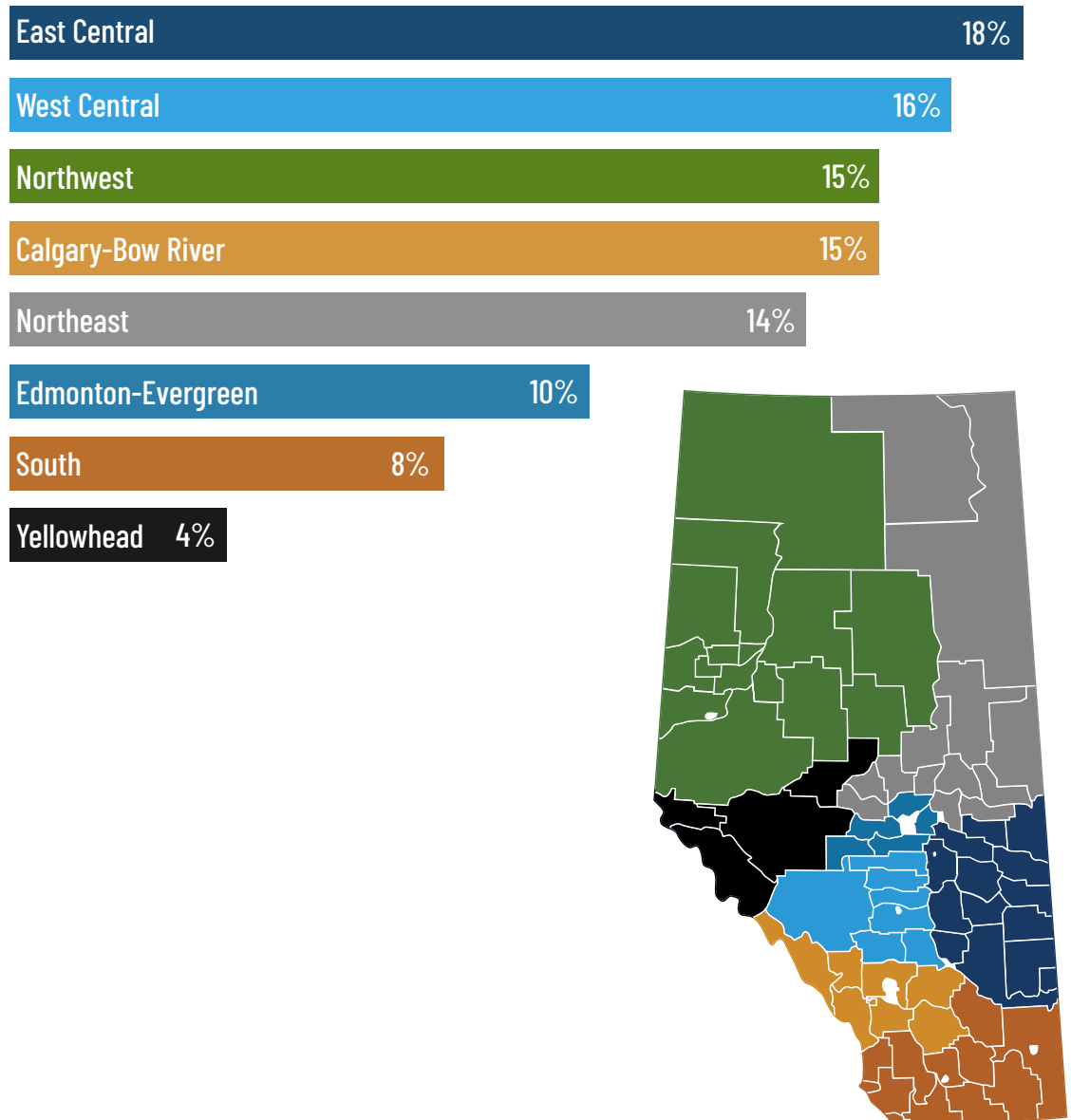
The Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC) at the University of Alberta was tasked by the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) to conduct a deep dive into the contemporary challenges faced by rural FCSS programs across Alberta and the subsequent burdens being placed on rural municipalities.

To complete this task, the research team utilized a mixed-method study design that was reviewed and approved by the research ethics board of the University of Alberta

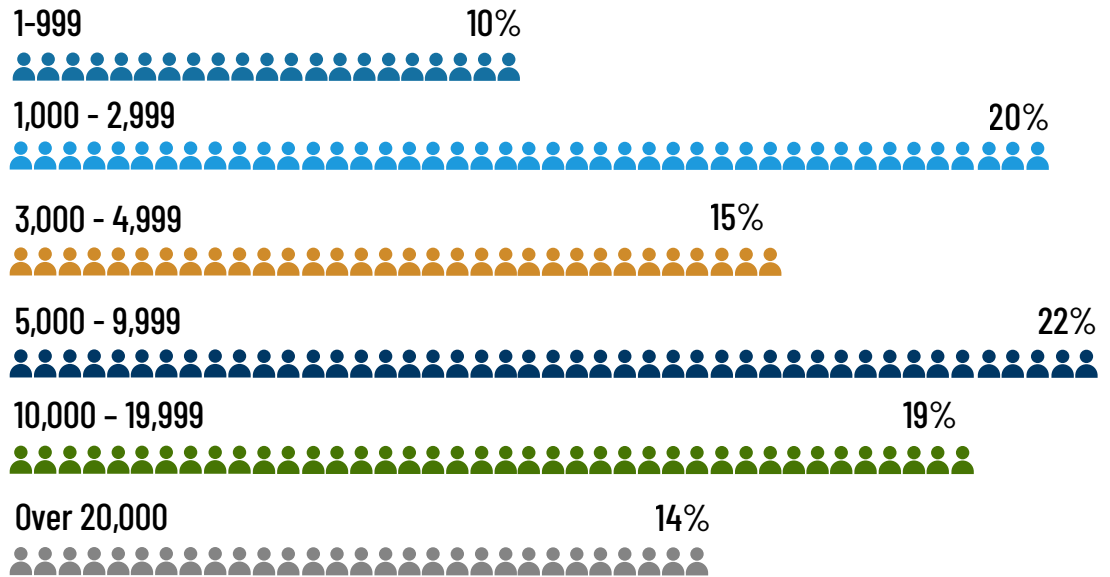
(Pro00124133). The research began by conducting 20 semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews with individuals deemed knowledgeable about this topic. Those interviewed included 16 different directors of rural and smalltown FCSS programs across Alberta, one member of the Family and Community Support Service Association of Alberta (FCSSAA), and three separate Government of Alberta employees with significant experience working with rural FCSS programs. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, were conducted online using Zoom, and were transcribed for thematic analysis by the research team.

After completing all 20 interviews, the research team designed a 38-question survey to further explore the depth of the challenges faced by rural FCSS programs identified in the interviews. This survey was conducted online, was emailed to the directors of 158 FCSS programs scattered across rural and smalltown Alberta and received a total of 80 respondents. As Figure 1 and Figure 2, page 8 suggest, the survey respondents provided a representative sample of rural FCSS programs from across the province. Not only did the research team receive a good number of replies from each FCSS region, they also received responses from various sizes and structures of FCSS programs in Alberta.

**Figure 1: What FCSS region is your program located in?**



**Figure 2: How large is the population your FCSS program serves?**



The results of this study, discussed in detail throughout the report, were derived from an analysis of both the qualitative interview portion and the quantitative survey portion described above. In short, the research team found that rural FCSS offices are facing several important challenges that impact their capacity to address the social needs that are arising in their communities. After a brief description of the FCSS program in general (, page 9), the report delves into three specific and interlocking challenges and describe their implications for rural FCSS offices, rural Albertans in need, and rural municipalities in general (Section 3: Key Challenges, page 13). The report closes with four policy recommendations for the Government of Alberta (GOA) that would, if implemented, contribute to re-establishing the full capacities of rural FCSS offices, positively impact the lives of many of rural Alberta’s most vulnerable citizens who are currently being poorly served, and substantially relieve the additional FCSS-related fiscal load rural municipalities are being asked to shoulder in the current environment.





## \* SECTION 2: WHAT ARE FAMILY & COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES?

Social service delivery in Alberta is a complex file stretching across a variety of provincial ministries, agencies, and organizations. Family and community support services (FCSS) sit amid this complicated web, currently existing within the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services, but frequently collaborating with agencies from the ministries of Health, Education, Children’s Services, and Mental Health and Addiction, among others.

With a history stretching back to 1966, there are now 210 local FCSS programs across Alberta providing services to 316 municipalities and Métis Settlements, most of which can be designated as “rural” or “small town.”<sup>1</sup> All but a handful of FCSS programs are represented by the Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta (FCSSAA), a member-driven organization that brings FCSS directors and staff together for educational and networking opportunities, while also representing FCSS programs to various stakeholders,

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1 Technically, FCSS does not make any formal distinction between rural vs. urban, although there do exist strong perceptions among FCSS directors that “rural” FCSS programs, however defined, face distinct challenges from “urban” programs. Although it is possible to select a formal measure to define rural from urban, there is little reason to do so in this context given that there exist many FCSS programming partnerships across Alberta between low population / low density rural counties or villages and higher population cities (for example, the partnership between the City of Camrose and Camrose County under the umbrella of Camrose and District Social Services) that make drawing a divide between rural and urban especially complicated when it comes to FCSS.



especially the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Fundamentally, the mandate of FCSS programs is to provide preventive social services, defined as “a proactive process that strengthens the protective factors of individuals, families, and communities to promote well-being, reduce vulnerabilities, enhance quality of life, and empowers them to meet the challenges of life.” More specifically, FCSS programs are meant to enhance “protective factors to improve well-being and prevent problems before they occur or at an early stage before they require crisis supports.”<sup>2</sup>

FCSS programs are governed by the provincial *Family and Community Support Services Act*, although both their creation and the structure and programming decisions they make are strongly rooted in their local communities. When a municipality or Métis Settlement council decides to establish an FCSS program, they enter into an agreement with the Government of Alberta to jointly fund projects, services, or both. Since 1966, the funding model has been set at an 80/20 split, with the province meant to provide 80% of the core funding for FCSS programming and the municipality providing the remaining 20%.<sup>3</sup> As of 2023, the total annual provincial funding for FCSS programs across Alberta is \$105 million. Importantly, the FCSS model also relies upon what was described to the research team as “the multiplier effect.” In essence, the funds contributed by the provincial and municipal governments are further buttressed by significant on-the-ground volunteer participation, especially from community organizations who partner with local FCSS offices on a variety of programming. This significantly extends the reach of FCSS programming. In 2021, FCSS programs across Alberta reported more than 47,850 volunteers contributing over 1,295,700 volunteer hours annually.



## The Importance of Local Autonomy

Since 1981, local FCSS offices have had considerable autonomy to structure their programs and design their day-to-day programming in ways that are best suited to meet the local conditions in their respective communities. Indeed, “local responsibility for decision-making” remains a key principle of the entire FCSS program. Although the GOA is meant to provide the bulk of program funding, municipalities and Métis Settlements must “decide how to allocate the funding to best meet the needs and priorities of the community — within the FCSS

- 2 “Family and Community Support Services Accountability Framework,” Government of Alberta, December 2022.
- 3 For a more detailed history of FCSS in Alberta, as well as more information of the variety of regulations FCSS programs must follow, see: “Understanding FCSS,” published by the *Family and Community Social Services Association of Alberta*. Available at: <https://fcssaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FCSS-101-All-Modules-2021.pdf>





mandate”.<sup>4</sup> This concept was repeatedly highlighted as a strength of the FCSS model in our study, a conclusion that coincides with academic literature on rural community development, which frequently stresses the importance of local autonomy as a key ingredient in program success across issues<sup>5</sup>. Unsurprisingly, this autonomy has also ensured a good deal of variation across FCSS programs in Alberta — there is no standard FCSS model in the province.

At the municipal level, FCSS programs can be operated directly by single municipalities, as multi-municipal programs, or in partnerships. The single municipality structure is most common. In a multi-municipal program, two or more municipalities join as a “regional” or “district” FCSS program, and each participating municipality makes its 20% contribution to the program budget. In a partnering or “grant transfer” FCSS organization, neighbouring municipalities agree to give some or all of their FCSS funds to one of the municipalities to provide services to residents of the partnering municipalities.

In addition to these three possible program structures, FCSS also offers three different models of program administration: the FCSS department (or FCSS program), the community services department, or direct municipal management. An FCSS department has a designated FCSS program director and FCSS staff who are municipal employees and report to a manager or CAO. In a community services department arrangement, FCSS is part of a larger municipal department that provides other services like recreation. Under direct municipal management, the FCSS manager or CAO administers the FCSS program and reports directly to council, which has oversight over FCSS funding decisions. This model is more common in smaller communities with small FCSS budgets. The community services department model is common both in smaller communities and in larger cities, and the FCSS department model is popular in municipalities with medium-sized budgets.<sup>6</sup> There are also six FCSS non-profit societies. In these programs, FCSS staff are employees of the non-profit society, not municipal employees. Although they are independent of the municipality, non-profit FCSS programs are still mandated to provide programming that meets community needs and priorities.<sup>7</sup>

Day-to-day programming also varies across FCSS programs; several interview respondents spoke passionately about the importance of tailoring programming to specific community needs. The most frequently mentioned programs across all FCSS offices included parent and family support, early childhood development, and youth programs. FCSS directors also described programs to benefit seniors, including home support and organized opportunities for social interaction to combat isolation, as key components of their mandate. Annual volunteer appreciation events, providing welcoming services for newcomers to the community, and low-income tax clinics are three other examples of commonly provided services in small and rural FCSS programs. Helping connect community members in need to the provincial and federal benefit and support services they are entitled to also falls within FCSS’s mandate.

Certain types of support services fall outside of the FCSS mandate and are thus ineligible to be supported with FCSS funding. These include services that are primarily recreational or leisure-oriented in nature; services that offer direct assistance such as money, food, or

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4 See: “Understanding FCSS”

5 See: Yolande E. Chan, Jeffery A. Dixon, and Christine R. Dukelow, *Revitalizing Rural Economies*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013

6 “FCSS Program Structure, Administration and Delivery,” published by the Family and Community Social Services Association of Alberta, p.2. Available at: <https://fcssaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FCSS-101-All-Modules-2021.pdf>

7 “FCSS Program Structure, Administration and Deliver,” p.2

shelter; services which could be classified as intervention or rehabilitation; and services which duplicate programs that are the responsibility of a different ministry or government agency.<sup>8</sup>

## The Reality of FCSS Programs in Rural and Small Town Alberta

The research team heard repeatedly throughout this study that the FCSS office is often the only social service agency in rural communities. As this report will demonstrate, this is an important consideration that plays a central role in the challenges FCSS programs face across rural Alberta.

Given that they are often “the only shop in town,” rural FCSS programs are likely to spend a large portion of their funding on direct service delivery, including salaries for employees who provide direct service delivery. In general, this contrasts with larger urban FCSS programs, which tend to grant their funds to the myriad other community service organizations that exist to offer programming in urban centres rather than deliver programming themselves.

Where there are other social service agencies and community-based non-profits, rural FCSS offices often play a coordinating role. In addition to managing their own FCSS funds and outside grants, FCSS programs will often act as the banker or guarantor for community non-profits, helping them to write grants, manage funds, and fulfill reporting requirements. Several of the rural FCSS directors interviewed described this as a community development role: they want to reduce barriers for the community non-profit sector and see FCSS as having an important role in making funding accessible to local non-profit organizations.

Finally, while all the FCSS directors interviewed expressed their support for prevention as the core of FCSS services, it is also clear that provincial stipulations around funding only preventative programming frequently conflict with daily realities in rural communities. Many directors emphasized that rural FCSS programs serve as social service “catch-alls.” In the words of one director, “In rural communities, if you need help and you’re not sure where to go, you go to FCSS.” Rural FCSS offices are regularly approached by community members seeking assistance that often goes beyond prevention and FCSS staff are thus frequently placed in the largely untenable situation of “staying true to their mandate” and turning people in need away or providing some type of required intervention support, an action that not only goes beyond their mandate but also requires additional effort and resources that are not reimbursed by the GOA. Unfortunately, a variety of factors have pushed FCSS offices, especially those in rural communities, in this direction, placing significant additional stress on these programs.



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8 “Understanding FCSS,” p.4





## \* SECTION 3: KEY CHALLENGES

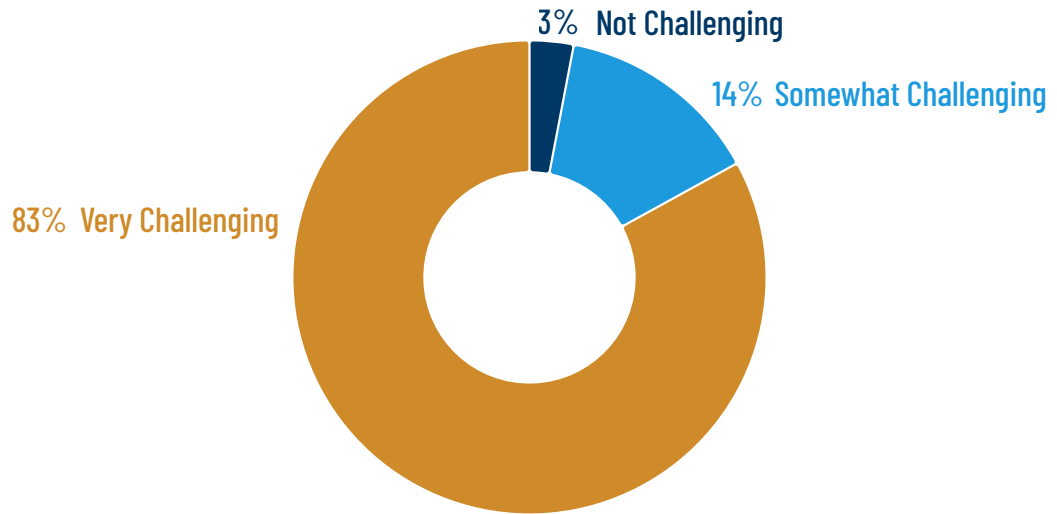
Over the course of this study the research team learned of a variety of challenges rural FCSS offices face, some specific to certain communities, others shared across the province. What follows is not a full account of all the challenges encountered, but rather a detailed consideration of three unique, complex, and often interlocking challenges that emerged as the most widespread and pressing for rural FCSS offices.

### Key Challenge 1: Insufficient Provincial Funding

The most significant challenge rural FCSS programs deal with is insufficient core funding. As mentioned in the introduction, the core programming of FCSS is meant to be funded by an 80% contribution from the GOA, with the remaining 20% from the FCSS's municipality (or municipalities). However, the overall contribution to the entire provincial FCSS program has remained stagnant at \$100 million since 2015, with a small increase of \$5 million in 2023. Given the very real challenges posed by the ongoing centralization of other social services, increasing need in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the inflationary pressures of the past few years, FCSS directors across rural Alberta were unanimous in their concerns that the failure by the GOA to meaningfully increase funding is tantamount to a funding cut. Indeed, within a series of survey questions, FCSS directors were asked to rate how challenging certain issues were to their operations. On a survey question asking about stagnation of provincial funding increase since 2015, over 83% of respondents suggested that this has been "very challenging" (see Figure 3, page 14), the highest scores among all challenges listed in the survey.



**Figure 3: How challenging has the lack of a funding increase since 2015 been to your FCSS program?<sup>9 10</sup>**

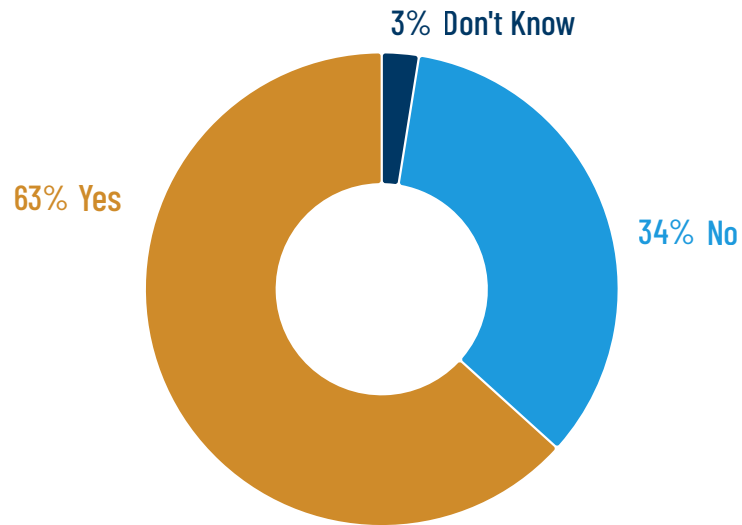


Although FCSS programs often supplement their core provincial and municipal funding with other government service contracts or grants, most rural FCSS offices increasingly rely on municipal contributions well over their required 20%. This municipal overcontribution often occurs because municipalities step in to fund programs which have become established in the community but have had provincial funding cut or are no longer affordable given rising costs of programming not being addressed with additional provincial funds. However, municipalities do not have unlimited budgets, and can make up only so much of the social service delivery shortfall created by the stagnation of provincial FCSS funding.

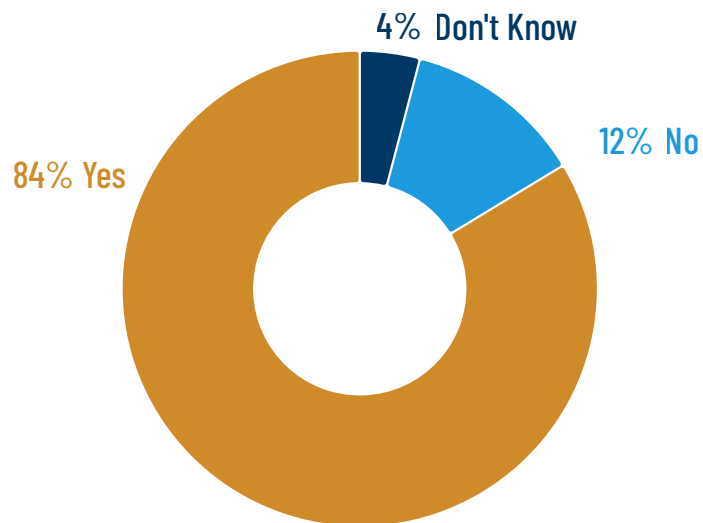
The survey results corroborated and expanded this information. Over 63% of survey respondents answered that their municipalities contribute more than the required 20% of FCSS funding (Figure 4, page 15). Almost 84% of survey respondents noticed an increase in the need for municipal overcontribution after 2018 (Figure 5, page 15). Of those respondents whose municipalities overcontribute, almost 43% estimated that the true contribution of their municipality is more than 35% of the FCSS program’s budget (Figure 6, page 16).

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- 9** For readability purposes, this data was collapsed from a survey question that employed a 10-point Likert Scale asking respondents to rate “how challenging” this was from 1 (not challenging) to 10 (extremely challenging). In this chart, scores from 1 – 3 were collapsed into “not challenging”, scores 4 – 6 were collapsed into “somewhat challenging”, and scores 7 – 10 were collapsed into “very challenging”.
- 10** This survey was completed in early 2023, before the increase in overall FCSS funding from \$100 million to \$105 million was announced by the GOA.

**Figure 4: Does your municipality (or municipalities) contribute more to your core funding than the required 20%?**

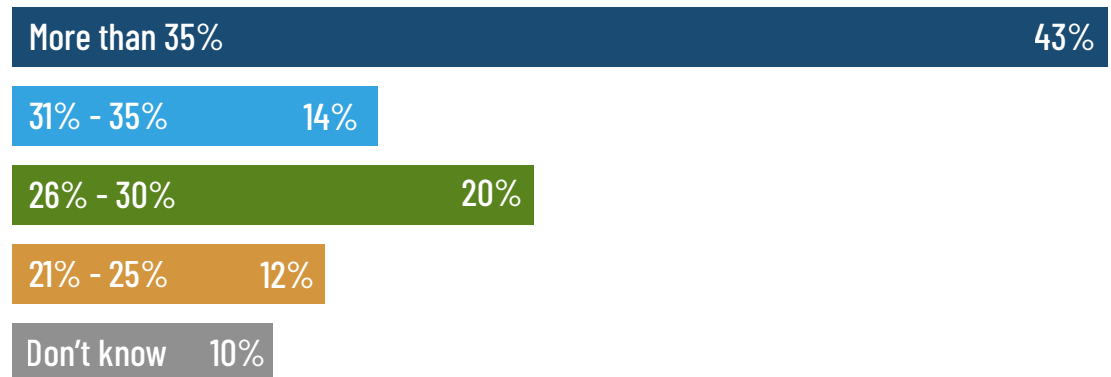


**Figure 5: Has the need for this municipal over-contribution increased since 2018?**





**Figure 6: If your municipality is contributing beyond 20% of your core funding, can you provide an estimate as to the true percentage that your municipality is contributing?**



Since “more than 35%” was the highest rate of overcontribution that survey respondents could choose, the survey did not capture the true rate of overcontribution in detail for municipalities with the highest rates of overcontribution. Indeed, within the interviews, the research team learned of one case wherein the municipality typically contributes about 50% of the FCSS program’s budget, but this year the contribution increased to 60%. Another director explained that their supporting municipalities will contribute more than the provincial amount this year.

Several FCSS programs are similarly growing more dependent upon outside grants for which FCSS directors must apply. Although outside grants (non-FCSS funding) make up a significant portion of some FCSS programs’ budgets, they make up very little or even none of other FCSS programs’ budgets. This is because accessing such funds depends on the capacity of individual FCSS programs. Directors and staff may or may not have the time or skillsets to identify, apply for, and manage external grants — a challenge that is especially acute for the smaller rural FCSS programs in Alberta.

Overall, the research team heard that insufficient funding is both a long-time concern and the result of recent events like the pandemic and some political decisions at the provincial level in 2019 – 2020 (to be discussed later). The funding challenges faced by rural FCSS programs can be broken down into four distinct components: insufficient operational funding, insufficient funding for staff, funding precarity / inattention to sustainability in funding, and, especially germane to this report, the funding challenges related to inattention to or lack of understanding of rurality on the part of the provincial government.





## Insufficient Operational Funding

Overall, rural FCSS programs do not feel they have the funds to adequately meet community needs. More specifically, respondents noted that there is a lack of funding to meet the operating costs for direct delivery of ongoing programs. Adequate and reliable program funding is extremely important because community members and service users come to rely on programs to support their own and their families' wellbeing. When a longstanding program is cut because of insufficient funding, this results in a loss of trust in the community and a decrease in individual and social wellbeing. As one director noted, "If we weren't seeking additional funding and partnerships, we would be offering a lot less to our communities."

As will be discussed later in the report, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent inflationary period has resulted in several FCSS offices offering expanded or revised programming to meet emerging community needs, or simply being pulled in new directions to help those in need; this increased demand means higher staffing and material costs. Some FCSS directors interviewed seemed eager to respond to increasing and changing community needs by expanding their capacity to address a wider and more complex range of issues and taking on a larger social role in their communities. These directors noted, however, that they cannot expand their capacity without increased funding, infrastructure, training, and staffing.

It is also clear that the community-based non-profits many rural FCSS programs partner with have more financial need than the local FCSS program can meet. These groups have also been impacted by increasing community need and several rural FCSS programs are fielding increased requests for funding from these organizations, especially to fund mental health supports.

Rural FCSS directors also told us that their budgets are often too small to allow them to apply for many grants, largely because they lack the staffing capacity to do so. For similar reasons, many are unable to engage meaningfully

with evidence-based practice. Without the capacity to fund staff education, training, or research, rural FCSS programs perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding the impacts of their programming and designing more effective programs.

Ministerial-level changes to programming have also meant funding decreases for rural FCSS programs. In particular, the transition from Parent Link Centres to the Family Resource Network (FRN) model has seen FCSSs having to participate in a competitive process for a smaller pool of funding.

## The Ending of Parent Link and the Introduction of Family Resources Networks

In 2019, the Ministry of Children’s Services announced, with essentially no consultation with the rural FCSS directors we spoke with, that funding for the Parent Link program was being cancelled. This popular program, frequently administered and delivered by FCSS offices in rural communities, provided free play groups, classes, education, and social opportunities for parents of children ages six and under, in addition to early learning opportunities and developmental screening for these children. In its place, the ministry launched a funding competition for organizations to participate in local Family Resource Networks (FRNs), a program with similar goals as Parent Link, although the program was now designed to offer supports for parents and children from 0 – 18, and the total amount of funding was now smaller.

In our interviews, this shift from Parent Link to FRNs was often a flashpoint for frustration for rural FCSS directors. Not only was the loss of Parent Link problematic for many parents of young children across rural communities who benefitted from the program offerings (especially those who relied on the access to the development screening available for very young children), FCSS directors lamented the increased competition between communities in search of a smaller pool of children-focused preventative funding made available under the FRN program. Other concerns shared included the difficulty inherent in delivering programs, with less overall funding, for children aged 0 – 18, the subsequent necessity to lay off staff in certain FCSS offices, and a broader sense that the new model’s reporting structures are “a chaotic mess” compared to those that existed under Parent Link.

The FRNs are recognized by many FCSS programs as a significant funding cut to child and youth support in rural communities, and many FCSS directors also noted other problems with the FRNs including organizational structure (discussed in more detail below). As a result of the transition to the FRN model, some communities have lost early childhood services completely, and that the loss of funding because of the reorganization of children’s services is hurting rural communities.

Finally, several directors highlighted that there is an overlooked rural component to FCSS

funding needs. Basing funding on population does not consider the needs of communities with high transient populations (like tourism-based economies). More generally, population does not give an accurate picture of need in rural communities because of the added costs rural communities experience because of large, sparsely populated areas, challenging geography, often poor internet and cell phone service, and transportation costs.

Overall, several of our respondents told us that their FCSS capacity is “maxed out” — current programs have full caseloads, FCSS offices are facing increasing need in their community and increasing costs overall, provincial funding did not increase between 2015 – 2022, and municipalities are being asked to shoulder more of the load.







### Insufficient Funding for Staff

Insufficient staff funding presents several challenges for rural FCSS programs. Many rural FCSS programs have minimal staff (sometimes just one person) and many directors felt they could more effectively serve their communities if they had the funding to hire even one or two more staff. Limited funding also means that rural FCSS offices struggle to be competitive with salaries and benefits, which can make it difficult to attract and retain qualified staff. Several directors brought up the challenge of trying to maintain a balance between appropriate staffing levels — and adequate compensation for qualified staff — with program funding and grants to community-based organizations.

Putting more effort into seeking outside sources of funding (e.g., other provincial, federal, private, or charitable grants) is often not an adequate solution to funding shortfalls because applying for grants requires time and expertise that is already in short supply for minimally staffed rural FCSS programs. Outside grant funding can also come with stipulations about how the grant money is to be used (e.g., developing new programs) that pull FCSS staff away from delivering core and established programs. More than one director has had to turn down grant opportunities, or be very careful when applying for outside funding, because of a lack of capacity to administer grants. Many grants also do not include wages as an eligible use of funds.

The loss of Parent Link Centres and transition to the FRNs has also had an impact on staffing at some FCSS offices. Many directors admitted that losing their Parent Link Centre caused them to significantly restructure their FCSS program and resulted in a loss of hours and staff. Many FCSS programs that were successful in applying for FRN funding noted that the FRN funding is a significantly smaller amount of money than they had received with the Parent Link program.

### Funding Precarity and the Lack of Sustainability in Funding

One of the significant stresses FCSS directors and staff experience is a sense of precarity over the future of FCSS. One respondent stated that “it seems to be this [feeling] ... always that FCSS is going to be gutted.” The people interviewed partially attribute this precarity and uncertainty to a sense of political instability in Alberta. The research team heard that there is a lack of clear signalling from the GOA that FCSS funding is secure. One director described waiting for FCSS’s next three-year agreement, which was overdue at the time of the interview, as a “nerve-wracking situation”.

Respondents also noted that formerly secure and reliable contracts are increasingly being put up for bid. One director said “We don’t know what’s going to happen” with a home care contract their FCSS has held for more than ten years. The team also heard that funding and support for FCSS programming or programs administered by FCSS is often piecemeal and short-term, with a lack of attention given to program sustainability in the face of unreliable funding.

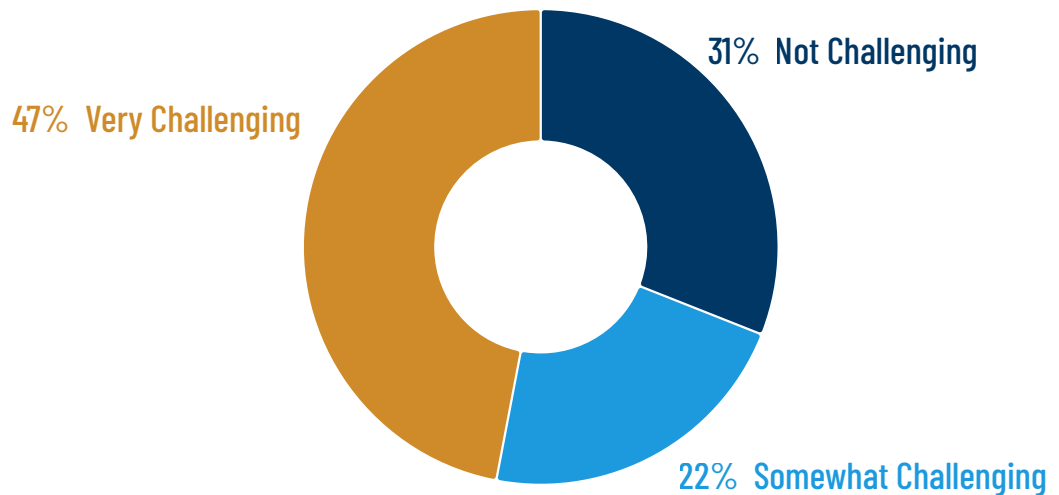
FCSS directors experience provincial funding for social services as episodic and identified the inconsistency of provincial funding and support for FCSS as a long-term problem. Several interviewees noted a pattern where the GOA will introduce a pilot program for social services

with limited-term funding (one to three years is common). In many cases, just when the program is starting to show results, the funding is inexplicitly dropped. Unexpected program restructuring and shifting government priorities contribute to challenges both in meeting government targets and in serving community members in a consistent, reliable way. From the perspective of FCSS, when funding for a program is ended, the reasons for the cut can be much better explained by a bias towards political novelty than by evidence of a need to revise policies.

The result of this sense of scarcity and instability, we were told, is increased territorialism between social service agencies. Organizations that could partner with each other instead may find themselves competing for funding. Many directors also pointed out that underfunding preventive social services ultimately results in increased social service costs. One director explained that “We put all of these dollars in ... intervention work, but if we put more money in ... prevention work ... we wouldn’t need as many dollars in intervention”.

The ending of the Parent Link program in late 2019 and early 2020 is an important example of this kind of unexpected program restructuring and funding instability. Results from the research team’s survey on this topic require some interpretation and possibly further research. In simplest terms, the survey results seem to show that the ending of the Parent Link program and its replacement with the Family Resource Network model (FRN) was either experienced as extremely challenging, or as not at all challenging. Roughly 31% of survey respondents rated the replacement of Parent Link by the FRN model as “not challenging,” while roughly 47% rated the replacement as “very challenging” (Figure 7, page 20). These two answers at opposite ends of the scale received the highest number of responses.

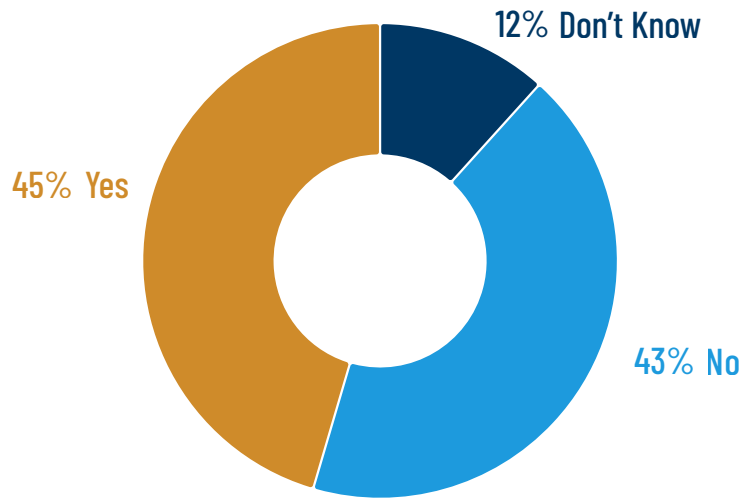
**Figure 7: How challenging was the replacement of Parent Link Centres by Family Resource Networks for your FCSS program?<sup>11</sup>**



Similarly, respondents were evenly split on the effects of ending Parent Link. Just over 45% of respondents said that their FCSS program was negatively affected by the ending of the Parent Link program, while almost 43% of respondents indicated that the ending of Parent Link did not negatively affect their program (Figure 8, page 21).

<sup>11</sup> For readability purposes, this data was collapsed from a survey question that employed a 10-point Likert Scale asking respondents to rate “how challenging” this was from 1 (not challenging) to 10 (extremely challenging). In this chart, scores from 1 – 3 were collapsed into “not challenging”, scores 4 – 6 were collapsed into “somewhat challenging” and scores 7 – 10 were collapsed into “very challenging”.

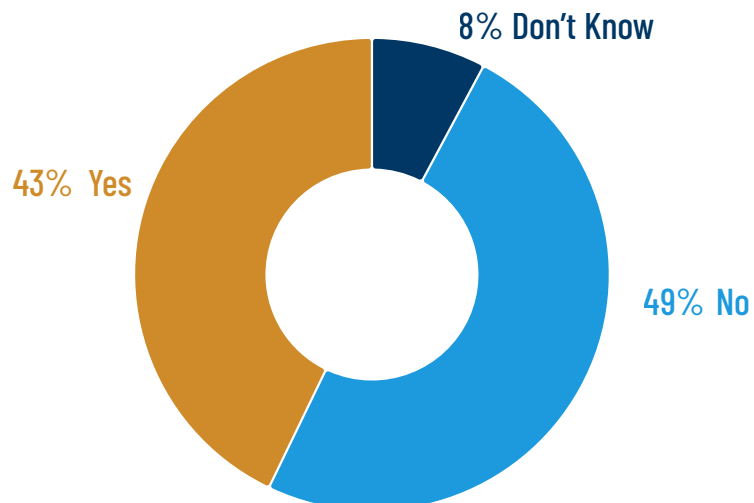
**Figure 8: Was your FCSS program negatively affected by the ending of the Parent Link program?**



Evidence given by interview participants was stronger and more clear-cut about the negative impacts of the ending of the Parent Link program and the transition to FRNs. Participants variously described the loss of Parent Link as “dramatic” and a “traumatic loss.” They described the transition to the FRNs as “abysmal” and “a chaotic mess” which introduced “a lack of clarity” about the role of FCSS in supporting child and youth development. Directors stated that the ending of Parent Link and transition to the FRN model was not just about funding. Many also expressed concerns related to a lack of clarity from the government about reporting expectations, goals and outcomes, and communication more generally.

Almost 59% of survey respondents answered that FRN funding was insufficient to adequately meet the needs of community members who had formerly attended Parent Link programming (Figure 9, page 21).

**Figure 9: Has FRN funding allowed you to adequately meet the needs of community members who formerly attended Parent Link programming?**





More than one director said that, under the FRN structure, they received about one-third of the funding they had received with Parent Link. As difficult to navigate as a two-thirds funding cut for early childhood programming must have been, the FRNs also imposed a requirement to expand the amount and type of services provided. Parent Link programs served families with children aged 0 – 6 years, while the FRNs cover ages 0 – 18. This means that FCSS programs which were successful in receiving FRN funding took on responsibility for providing services that meet the needs of families, children, and youth across a much wider range of developmental stages. Several directors expressed concern that the funding and administrative structure for the FRNs forced communities within the same region to compete for funding — something that has strained relationships between communities in certain cases.

Directors told us that in some cases their municipalities have stepped in to fund the programs that were formerly funded through Parent Link, while in other cases the loss of Parent Link and its funding had resulted in a loss of programming, jobs, and services. Directors agreed that programming for 0- to 18-year-olds was important but said that the expansion could have happened within the model already established by Parent Link. Directors agreed that the Parent Link model was much more functional, consistent, and easy to coordinate than the FRN model.

### **Rural-Specific Funding Challenges for FCSS Programs**

Being rural significantly shapes the financial needs of FCSS programs. Many of the directors interviewed feel the GOA does not understand or appreciate the unique cost-of-living and opportunity constraints faced by rural communities. In particular, the research team heard about issues related to transportation and limited access to social services in rural communities. The team also heard from northern FCSS programs about the isolation their communities face and about how a recent economic downturn due to changes in the oil and gas industry is putting strain on residents and social programs. These and similar stories suggest that it is important to pay attention not only to ruralness as a factor in the social needs of Albertans but also to variation within rural Alberta, and to the geographic, socio-cultural, and economic reasons for this variation.

Many of the issues faced by rural FCSS programs can also be framed in terms of an urban-rural divide. FCSS directors were quick to tell us that they do not measure themselves against urban FCSS programs and that there is generally open communication and sympathy within FCSSAA and between rural and urban programs. Nevertheless, urban FCSS programs have significantly greater access to both financial and human resources. The research team heard several times that resources are more likely to go to Alberta’s urban centres, and that grants tend to be geared more towards urban organizations with administrative, data collection, and analytical capacity. The knowledge that funding is more accessible to urban FCSS programs which already have larger budgets and greater personnel capacity is experienced by rural FCSS directors as a kind of arbitrary punishment: one director told us that rural communities are “penalized for being small” when it comes to accessing social service funding.

Almost every director noted that rural FCSS programs are incredibly important because there often are no other social services available in small communities. Rural FCSS directors feel that decision-makers in urban settings do not realize how few social services there are in rural





communities, which leads to underestimating the needs of rural communities and the complexity of the situations to which rural FCSS programs must respond. The research team was told that, in rural communities, FCSS programs cannot be specialized because there often are no other social service agencies, and that rural FCSS staff must be similarly flexible, adaptable, and able to wear “many different hats.” There is a strong perception on the part of rural FCSS directors that urban FCSS programs have a narrower social focus and more internal specialization due to their

proximity to other social service agencies and greater ease of access to outside professionals such as mental health counsellors. Rural FCSS directors count their flexibility and “jack of all trades” pragmatism as a strength, in part because it means that they feel connected to and knowledgeable about the social wellbeing of their communities. However, directors are aware that the flip side of being a “jack of all trades” means that there is no one else around that one can consult or bring in to offer specialized knowledge or support for complex social issues.

Directors repeatedly raised transportation as a significant barrier for rural residents. Simply put, there is a lack of public transportation or other affordable and reliable transportation options serving rural communities. Residents often live long distances from neighbours and from municipal centres wherein so many social and health support offices are located. Lack of access to transportation is particularly acute for people living on low or fixed incomes. One of FCSS’s important preventive roles is guarding against isolation and increasing social connection. If people are unable to travel to programming, FCSS’s capacity to reach people is limited.

Transportation is also an issue for more acute social and personal needs, such as attending medical appointments or appointments with other social service agencies, either locally or in the city. FCSS programs are generally prohibited from using designated governmental funding to offer transportation service. At least one director told the research team that their FCSS provides a transportation service that they pay for with non-FCSS funding because reducing barriers to participation is a core FCSS goal. Directors also emphasized the need to provide outreach services and to meet people where they live in cases where an individual is housebound or unable to travel.

Another infrastructure issue rural FCSS directors raised concerned lack of available, appropriate, and affordable space for programming. Rural communities often have a limited stock of buildings suitable to rent or borrow for events, and building new infrastructure is for the most part prohibitively expensive for FCSS programs with limited budgets.

One final significant piece the research team heard regarding rural FCSS programs’ funding challenges is that some rural communities have experienced population growth or economic development and have increased in importance as regional hubs. While this shift may suggest an important corrective to assumptions of rural decline, the team was told that provincial FCSS funding has not kept pace with, or has not yet recognized, this growth. FCSS programs in these communities now have more clients, but in at least some cases, have had to cut programming to shift resources to “maxed-out” programs.

## Key Challenge 2: The Increasing Inaccessibility of Provincial Social Services in Rural Alberta

It is increasingly difficult for both rural residents and rural FCSS offices to access provincial government support services. This is partly the result of a long-running trend of the centralization of public services that has occurred in Alberta and elsewhere. In general, the story has been the same across Canada for more than three decades: stagnant populations in rural areas, combined with the ever-present search for “efficiencies” among cost-conscious provincial governments has led to a “retreat of the state” from rural areas. As one rural FCSS director noted, to the extent that services still exist in small communities, they are often “a shell of what they used to be.”

Nearly all FCSS directors who took part in this study highlighted the ongoing process of centralization of social services. They noted that, not only did these processes often unfold with little consultation or communication with key community stakeholders (including FCSS offices), this decline of services has significantly impacted rural community members who are dependent on government services but are now being asked to travel much farther at their own expense to a government office or healthcare facility for assistance. This presents a very real barrier for many community members for whom financial insecurity or health concerns make such travel difficult, if not impossible.

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*“For a long time, we have been talking with Alberta Supports and Alberta Works... We have been requesting that they provide a person on a regular basis, like once a month, to come to our office ... and there is an absolute refusal. There was zero interest in them being accessible out here. Their solution was that, if there are clients that need help, they can call their office and book an appointment to meet with those clients. But it still required a person to travel that 45 plus minutes.”*

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This is not a new observation with respect to the delivery of rural public services. However, what is increasingly evident for FCSS offices across rural Alberta is that, given that they are now very often “the only place in town” that is understood to offer social supports to community members in need, FCSS offices are often shouldered with additional requests for help from residents.

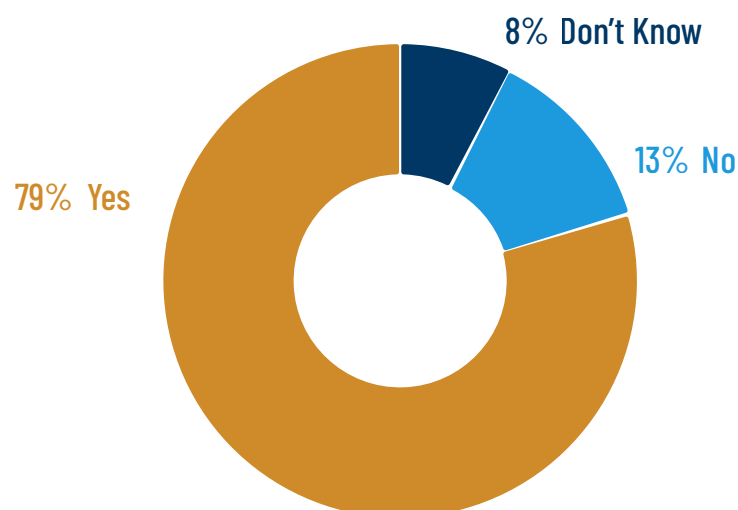
Part of this trend seems to have been by design on the part of the GOA. A significant concern raised frequently by FCSS directors is the ongoing “downloading” of additional responsibilities that were once within the purview of other provincial agencies onto FCSS offices, often without additional financial support or meaningful training. One FCSS director recounted a time wherein a designated provincial support worker would routinely visit the office to help local seniors with applications required to access certain supports or benefits. That worker eventually stopped coming and instead, “Our office got a PowerPoint and my staff are expected to go out and share the information on their services and benefits to the community.”

This may seem like an insignificant anecdote, but the research team heard a version of this story repeatedly during the study. The consistent downloading of tasks is further stressing FCSS programs across rural communities by increasing their workload without access to additional provincial funding.

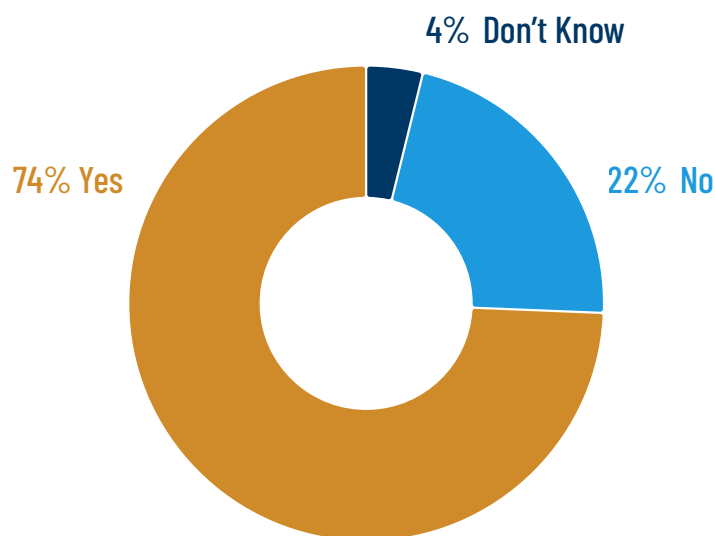
A related outcome of centralization of support services is, even if rural FCSS programs are not technically being asked to “take on” additional responsibilities, because they are often “the only place in town” offering any type of supports, community members requiring help will frequently show up at FCSS offices with requests for assistance. However, such requests are often beyond the FCSS’s legislated mandate of providing preventative services and thus, technically, meant to be addressed by other agencies who, in many cases, no longer have a physical presence in the community.

As Figure 10, page 25 and Figure 11, page 26 show, the overwhelming majority of rural FCSS directors are being forced to extend their mandate and completing additional work beyond what they are funded to do. Importantly, there is a strong sense that these requirements have significantly increased since 2018 (Figure 12, page 26).

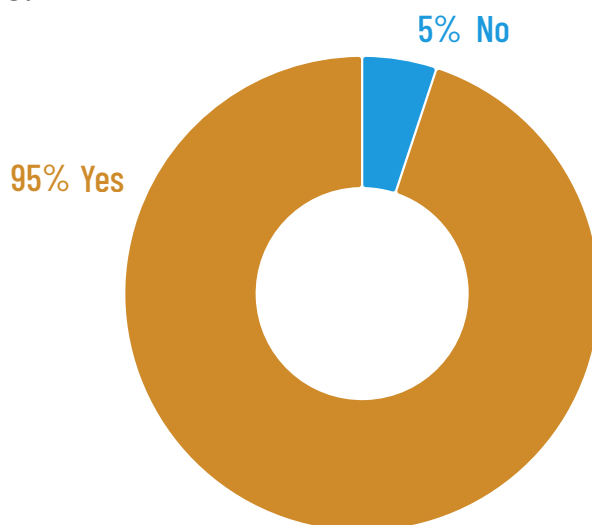
**Figure 10: Do you feel your FCSS program is having to take on responsibilities that are meant to be the mandate of other provincial ministries or agencies?**



**Figure 11: Does your FCSS program occasionally provide services to community members beyond those you understand to fall under the mandate of “prevention”?**



**Figure 12: Has this pressure to provide services beyond “prevention” increased since 2018?**



### **The Relational Realities of Rural Life**

Pressure for FCSS offices to complete work beyond their mandate is amplified by the “relational reality” of small-town life. Compared to urban centres, there is a higher likelihood that members of a rural FCSS office have some personal connection or familiarity to the community member in need and thus feel an additional responsibility to help, even when the request is well outside FCSS’s mandate. Even if this relational component is not part of the equation in a given request for help from a community member, the fact that rural FCSS offices are more likely to provide direct services compared to urban FCSS offices (who are more likely to “grant-out” their funding to other organizations), make them more prone to being approached for this kind of help.

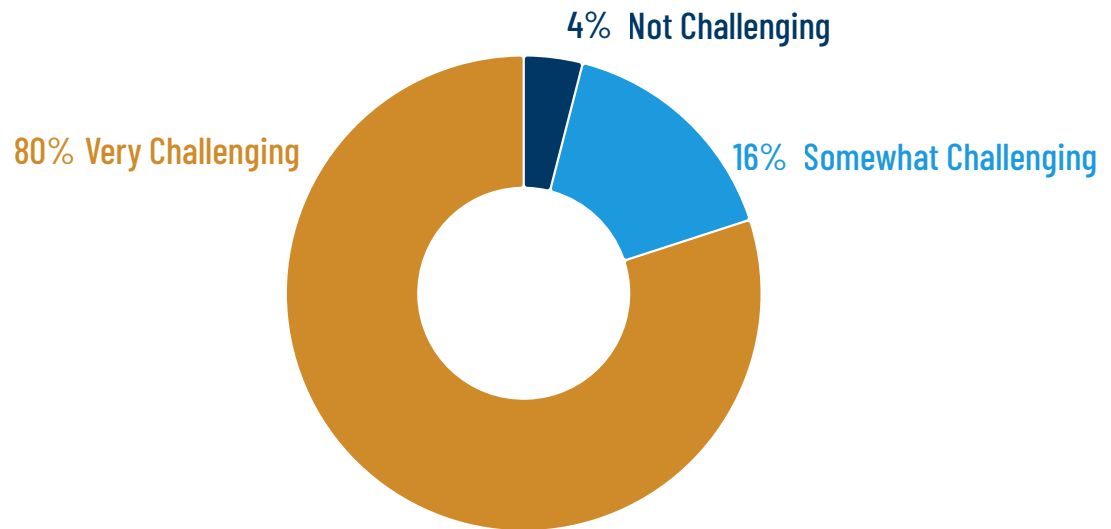
In either case, that rural FCSS offices have essentially become one of the last physical places (if not the only place) where people in need of social services can seek help, they are automatically placed in the unfair and untenable situation of having to go beyond their

mandate and provide intervention-type services (incurring the extra cost and effort this entails with no hope of being reimbursed) or turning away a community member in need, who may be someone they know personally, or at least someone they have a high likelihood of encountering again.

### The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Shuttering of Additional In-person Support Services

This reality of rural FCSS offices as the only local site of social supports has intensified in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent decision by the GOA to shutter or reduce in-person services across several social service agencies (conversely, almost all rural FCSS offices remained open throughout the pandemic). Alberta Supports was the service most frequently mentioned in this context by FCSS directors, but it certainly is not the only example of social services offices closing. In place of provincial in-person services, those in need of assistance on a range of issues, such as mental health supports, victim services, senior supports, and AISH applications are increasingly required to call a “1-800” line or seek assistance via an online web platform or email. Every FCSS director interviewed for this study highlighted the negative impact of this change on their operational capacity. FCSS directors were asked about the severity of this challenge (Figure 13, page 27) and roughly 80% of respondents rated this as “very challenging.”

**Figure 13: How challenging have increased community member requests due to the centralization of provincial services like Alberta Supports, Mental Health and Addictions, and Children’s Services, been for your FCSS program?<sup>12</sup>**

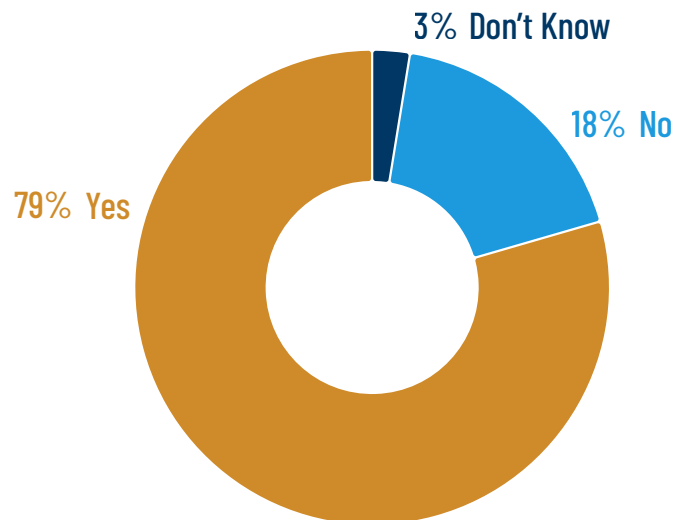


Online and telephone services have severe limitations for vulnerable people in rural communities. Several FCSS directors noted how difficult it can be for community members in need to navigate this new impersonal system. Stories of community members being left on hold for hours on end, of running out of minutes on their “pay as you go” cell phone plans while waiting for help, of attempting to navigate confusing web portals with poor internet service, and of seniors without email addresses being asked to “sign-in online” were very

<sup>12</sup> For readability purposes, this data was collapsed from a survey question that employed a 10-point Likert Scale asking respondents to rate “how challenging” this was from 1 (not challenging) to 10 (extremely challenging). In this chart, scores from 1 – 3 were collapsed into “not challenging”, scores 4 – 6 were collapsed into “somewhat challenging” and scores 7 – 10 were collapsed into “very challenging”.

common. For rural FCSS offices, this has led to a significant influx in community members seeking help. As noted in Figure 14, page 28, this has resulted in an increase in the amount of time FCSS staff must spend one-on-one with community members — time that is now no longer available for traditional preventative programming that is central to FCSS’s mandate.

**Figure 14: Are your FCSS staff spending more time working with community members one-on-one since 2018?**



This new reality is captured well in this extended quote from a long-time rural FCSS director:

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*“The lack of foresight when it comes to centralization of services, the 1-800 numbers, the online portals; these do not work for all people in our community, particularly those that are illiterate, that don’t have telephones, and that don’t have computer skills. And my growing concern is that we are skewing statistics to look like rural communities do not need services because they’re not able to access them.*

*When you look at seniors’ programs, seniors’ benefits, when you look at income support, when you look at even victim services, mental health services, continuing care, all of that has become a ‘1-800’ intake. So you take somebody who has mental health concerns, they’re on the line waiting for sometimes two, three hours, only to be cut off. And still not get to an actual appointment.*

*This is something that my staff experience on a daily basis with folks. Some days, we have five, six people in need come who come in here at their wit’s end, they have no money, no phone, no internet access, no ID, and we are the only ones that try to maneuver through the system with them.*

*And this is what’s happening in all of our rural communities. And we need a voice to say ‘no, this isn’t working.’ And my fear is that the provincial government is swinging the pendulum to a fully centralized intake system because it’s saving money, it’s efficient...*

*These things pull us away from what the true mandate of FCSS is. And so it does cause a lot of stress on the staff, a lot of burnout, and a lot of feelings of helplessness, almost because there’s nothing they can do.*

*And I would say everybody in (our office) has thought about walking away. But their sense of responsibility won’t let them because they’re also the ones that look people in the eye, as opposed to the person on the other end of a ‘1-800’ call.”*

## Negative Impacts on Rural Clients

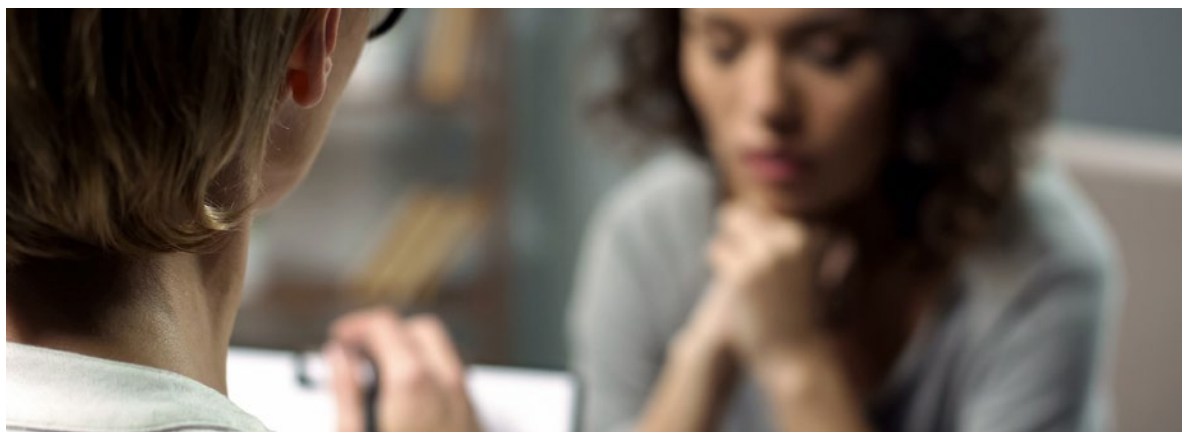
Unsurprisingly, not only has the recent move towards “1-800” lines and online platforms stressed rural FCSS offices, these changes have also resulted in noticeable negative impacts on rural citizens in need. Several rural FCSS directors spoke passionately about the reality of more vulnerable community members simply “falling through the cracks” and not receiving the help they require, and are entitled to, because the system has become far too inaccessible. Several FCSS directors recounted stories of people simply “giving up” and not pursuing the help they need. As the quote above suggests, there are legitimate fears that the true volume of “need” in rural communities is much more significant than what appears in provincial statistics because so many rural citizens either fail to navigate the new virtual reality of provincial supports or they have stopped trying. This was precisely the moral of one of the more dramatic (although not unique) stories shared with the research team:

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*“We had an individual that was threatening to commit suicide, or even take other people out because he was so frustrated with trying to navigate the provincial social services system. And so we did a bit of an intervention with him, and we were able to develop some supports that we could offer to him and support him, and help navigating some of those services. But I mean it, it was so bad that he was very serious about taking his own life. So, that’s just one example of where what happens when you have people that are already in challenging situations, and they just are getting the runaround from agencies and governments, and when there aren’t really clear lines about who is supposed to be doing what. I know there’s a lot of discussion in the FCSS world around the centralization of Alberta Supports. And I feel like we haven’t received as many clients requesting this type of help recently, and it’s mostly because people have given up.”*

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Even in cases where individuals are able to connect with support workers online or over the phone, many FCSS directors noted that such impersonal “virtual intakes” frequently fail to uncover the full range of services vulnerable people need. The result is “the loss of a continuum of service” wherein the social support system can “wrap around the entire client” and ensure they are both properly taken care of and receive the full multitude of supports they need. Further, clients no longer have a consistent contact person to follow up in this environment, leading to additional challenges accessing the required supports. Ultimately, as one rural FCSS director explained, “The actions of the provincial government [in transitioning to ‘1-800’ lines or online web portals for intakes and assistance] ... summarily dismissed people who are already disenfranchised.”



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In summary, the ongoing centralization of social services in Alberta has generated significant challenges for rural FCSS programs and rural citizens — challenges that have only multiplied with the recent decision to fast-track a transition to telephone intake lines and online web portals for a variety of provincial social service supports (especially Alberta Supports) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because rural FCSS offices are often “the only shop in town,” they face a disproportionate burden compared to most of their urban counterparts. Indeed, this issue raises a serious equity concern. Multiple provincial agencies mandated to deliver supports to all Alberta citizens have increasingly reduced their in-person supports to rural Albertans. Rural FCSS offices are subsequently faced with helping vulnerable community members navigate this new system — a considerable task for offices already facing funding and capacity pressures. This in turn intensifies pressure on rural municipalities to increase funding to local FCSS programs, which has resulted in a significant increase in municipal overcontribution to FCSS programs across rural Alberta.

### Key Challenge 3: Changing and Increasing Social Needs in Rural Communities

Rural FCSS directors were essentially unanimous in highlighting the changing nature and the overall increase of social service needs in their communities — two trends that have also placed new stresses on already taxed FCSS programs in rural Alberta. Although tracing precise causes of such complex trends is difficult, the FCSS directors we spoke with were adamant that both the COVID-19 pandemic and recent inflation are key drivers of changing and increasing client needs.

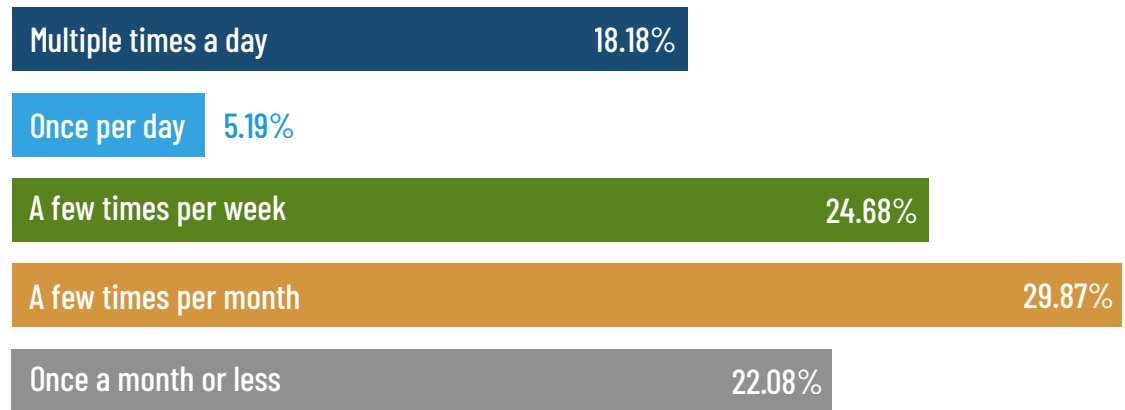
The COVID-19 pandemic presented unique and difficult challenges for all Albertans. Rural FCSS directors spoke at length about a clear decline in the mental health of many of their clients, of the impacts of social isolation (especially for children and seniors), and increased anxiety related to both physical health and financial wellbeing. In addition, directors noticed new patterns of division within communities, decreased comfort levels in group settings, and declining levels of healthy behaviours in the wake of basically losing two years of FCSS group programming.

The current period of inflation has added more stress on many of the most vulnerable in our communities. Multiple FCSS directors spoke of “unprecedented demand” for the services of local food banks, of noticing more and more people “not eating,” and of a more general decline in the mental health of many given the overarching anxiety fast-rising prices of all key staples can cause in those populations without the means to absorb significantly higher costs. Several rural FCSS directors also noted increasing levels of homelessness in their communities, a trend that was already emerging prior to the pandemic, and has grown worse in the past few years.

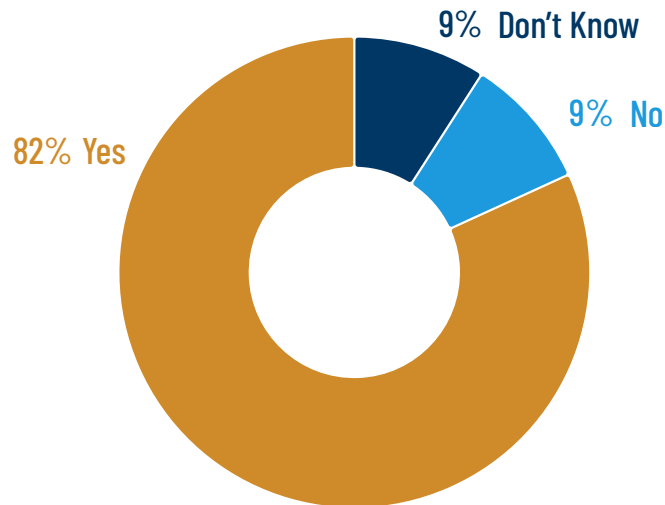
Overall, rural FCSS directors are receiving more requests for assistance than previous years and are encountering more complex cases involving serious mental health issues, addictions, domestic abuse, crime, and individuals and families in serious financial distress. In short, the number of people who are walking through the doors of rural FCSS offices in crisis has increased dramatically in the past few years (See Figure 15, page 31 and Figure 16, page 31).



**Figure 15: How often do your FCSS staff encounter community members who are in a state of crisis?**

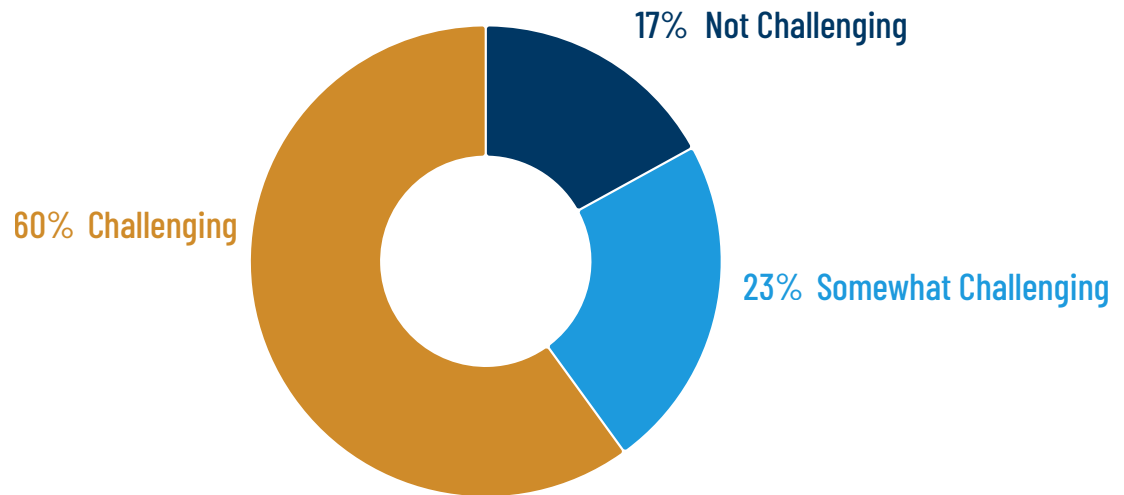


**Figure 16: Have your FCSS staff experienced an increase in community members who are in a state of crisis since 2018?**



These trends are especially problematic for rural FCSS offices because such cases clearly fall within the range of “intervention” rather than “prevention,” thus often pushing FCSS staff further beyond their legislated mandate. As discussed earlier, the “relational realities” of rural life make it especially difficult for rural FCSS staff to simply turn people in need of intervention away. Indeed, one clear outcome of this increased pressure that several rural FCSS directors noted was a noticeable rise in both workload and levels of personal stress among both FCSS staff and members of community organizations who partner with FCSS on local programming, often leading to what many respondents labelled as “staff burnout” (see Figure 17, page 32).

**Figure 17: How challenging has the problem of staff burnout been in your FCSS office?<sup>13</sup>**

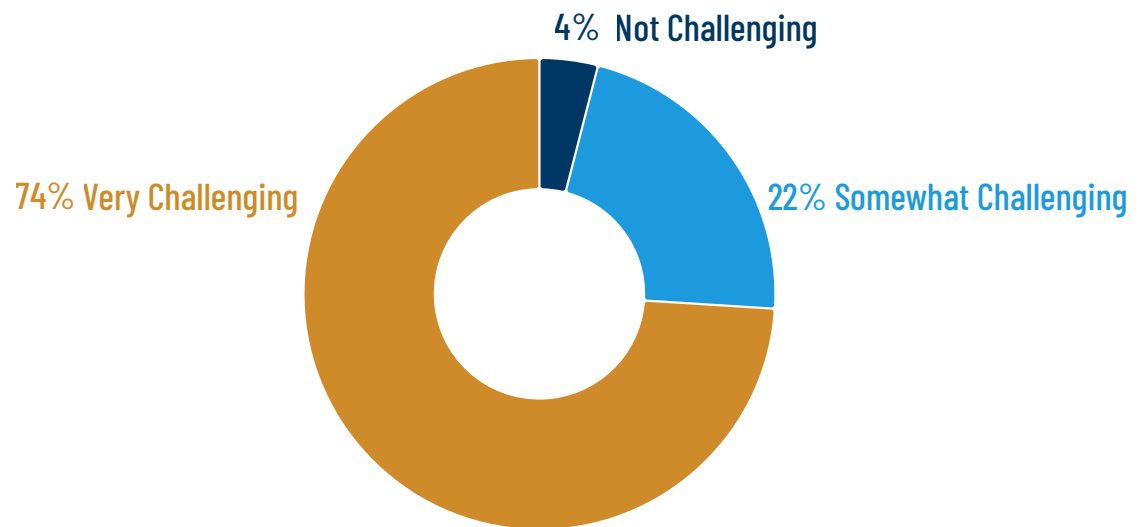


FCSS directors have faced increasing anxiety related to both the wellbeing of their staff and clientele, but also awareness that these patterns place even more fiscal pressure on their underfunded offices. In addition, many directors demonstrated a fair amount of despair in their conversations with us in response to their growing sense that provincial officials are simply unconvinced by their pleas regarding the increasingly dire situation facing both vulnerable individuals and rural FCSS offices.

Granted, the changing nature and increasing frequency of these social service needs are not localized to rural communities. It is likely that most urban social service providers across Alberta (if not North America and beyond) have noted similar patterns in the wake of the pandemic and the subsequent period of inflation. However, due to existing funding shortfalls and increasing client loads, these new challenges are pushing already taxed rural FCSS offices to the brink. FCSS directors were asked about the severity of this challenge (Figure 18, page 33) and roughly 74% of respondents deemed this to be “very challenging.”

<sup>13</sup> For readability purposes, this data was collapsed from a survey question that employed a 10-point Likert Scale asking respondents to rate “how challenging” this was from 1 (not challenging) to 10 (extremely challenging). In this chart, scores from 1 – 3 were collapsed into “not challenging”, scores 4 – 6 were collapsed into “somewhat challenging” and scores 7 – 10 were collapsed into “very challenging”.

**Figure 18: How challenging has increased demand for intervention-type services due to recent challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic or cost-of-living inflation to your FCSS program?<sup>14</sup>**



## Policy Recommendations

### 1. Increase Core Funding from the Province

The most commonly mentioned policy recommendation made by rural FCSS directors who participated in this study was simple: the provincial government must increase core funding for FCSS programs across the province. As mentioned earlier, provincial funding for FCSS programming remained capped at \$100 million from 2015 – 2022. In the meantime, several standard FCSS costs, from staff salaries to space rental to materials required for various on-the-ground programming have risen considerably. In this environment, many municipalities across rural Alberta have been forced to increase funding beyond their required 20% to prop up FCSS programs in their communities. Even with municipal overcontributions, the research team repeatedly heard about FCSS programs across rural Alberta facing significant fiscal pressure, often being forced to curtail programming, make smaller contributions to partnering community organizations, and reduce staff hours. Although the province increased overall funding to FCSS programs across the province by \$5 million in 2023, it is a near certainty that this amount will not be enough to address the key fiscal issues rural FCSS offices are facing.

A number of different ideas for ensuring more funds flow to rural FCSS offices were shared over the course of this study but, at minimum, it would be prudent for the provincial ministry to ensure annual increases in core funding are indexed to inflation. Given the emerging patterns of need discussed in the previous section, and the significant pressures the centralization of other social services puts on rural FCSS offices, there is an urgent need not only for funding to index with inflation but to increase significantly overall. Therefore, a significant increase to core funding that acknowledges the rising

<sup>14</sup> For readability purposes, this data was collapsed from a survey question that employed a 10-point Likert Scale asking respondents to rate “how challenging” this was from 1 (not challenging) to 10 (extremely challenging). In this chart, scores from 1 – 3 were collapsed into “not challenging”, scores 4 – 6 were collapsed into “somewhat challenging” and scores 7 – 10 were collapsed into “very challenging”.



need for the types of vital services and programs FCSS offices provide to their community members is also recommended. Widespread municipal overcontribution essentially means that the provincial government is failing to uphold the funding parameters that govern FCSS operations in Alberta: 80% from the province and 20% from the municipality. A meaningful increase to core funding would help to return the provincial-municipal funding balance to what is demanded by the terms of the FCSS Regulation. In an environment wherein the provincial government is basking in significant budget surpluses and has made several large spending announcements across different jurisdictions in the past year, a serious increase to the core funding of FCSS programs in Alberta seems imminently doable.

In addition, the provincial government must do more to ensure the sustainability of core funding for FCSS programming. Several FCSS directors noted that the current practice of signing three-year funding contracts with individual FCSS programs creates an unnecessary level of anxiety, and even program inertia, for directors and staff, especially when these contracts are frequently renewed at “the very last moment.” Similar concerns were shared in relation to “pilot programs” the provincial government decides to fund. These should be funded for at least three (if not five) years, and should not be abruptly ended without significant consultation with FCSS directors. The degree of precarity faced by FCSS offices on both these fronts adds additional stress to programs that are already “maxed out”.

## **2. Increase the Accessibility of Provincial Social Support Services for Rural Albertans**

In accordance with the second key challenge discussed above, the GOA must do more to ensure certain provincial social services remain or are returned to rural communities. No rural FCSS director we spoke with expected a full return of social services that once existed in rural Alberta decades ago. However, there are actions the GOA can take to lessen the load rural FCSS offices face in terms of the increased demand from community members given that they are often “the last shop in town” offering some social supports.

At a minimum, the province must revisit the decision to transition so many support services and client intakes to “1-800” lines and online web portals. Not only has this decision placed incredible stress on rural FCSS offices, it has also proven to have significantly negative impacts on vulnerable people throughout rural Alberta who find it very difficult, if not impossible, to navigate this new system. Re-opening the Alberta Supports offices that were shuttered over the pandemic would be the most appropriate first step in this direction.

More generally, a serious commitment from the GOA to ensure that more in-person social service supports are made available across a wider cross section of Albertan communities is required. While it is unrealistic to insist that every town and village across Alberta contain a selection of social service offices covering multiple issues, the province must ensure that there are physical offices within reasonable distances to all Alberta communities so rural Albertans can seek assistance in-person. Some additional assistance with transportation costs must also be included in such plans.

In addition, the GOA must reinvest in ensuring that social service workers who possess the capacity to truly help community members in need with various supports they are entitled to are travelling to and spending time in rural Alberta. The slow erosion of this practice has negatively impacted rural FCSS offices and vulnerable rural citizens. The principle of equitable treatment for all Albertans, urban and rural, requires revisiting this model.

### 3. Ensure that Future Public Policy Related to Social Service Delivery in Alberta is Approached via a Rural Lens

The practice of applying a “rural lens” to public policy decisions refers to an assessment that specifically considers how a proposed policy change will impact rural regions and peoples. To apply a “rural lens” to public policy decisions related to social service delivery in Alberta would require a careful and systematic consideration of the impact that any policy change in this area would have on rural Albertan communities and citizens.



Having outlined the challenges rural FCSS programs face, many recent decisions related to social service delivery in Alberta were not considered through a “rural lens.” Although FCSS programs across Alberta are facing increasing pressures in response to similar challenges, impacts are often felt most acutely by rural FCSS programs that bear most of the burden generated by the ongoing centralization of broader social service delivery. On a more technical note, the transition to the use of telephone and web portals by many social service agencies discounts the reality of both poor internet and spotty cellular service in rural regions. Although the past cannot be altered, future policy decisions related to provincial social services must more seriously engage with questions related to impacts on rural communities and citizens.

Throughout this study the team heard many ways in which ministries responsible for social service delivery could better anticipate the impacts of policy changes on rural Alberta. Several rural FCSS directors noted the current funding calculation that determines the provincial contribution to each FCSS program should take into account that the size and sparseness of rural communities leads to higher costs for offering different FCSS programs, and of sharing important information with community members. Similarly, although some consolidation and centralization of social services may be inevitable, rural FCSS directors insisted that, when relocating services, more must be done to understand the actual travel patterns that rural residents follow, rather than assuming that travelling to a location pre-determined by an Edmonton-based bureaucrat will be realistic for rural citizens from a specific community.

Several directors (although not all) were open to being more creative (and even somewhat radical) in terms of what rural FCSS programs can and should accomplish, given the realities they face. Rural FCSS offices are consistently “doing more with less” given the centralization of social service supports and the increasingly complex social challenges many rural Albertans are now facing. In such circumstances, more and more rural FCSS directors are asking whether they should take on an enlarged mandate capable of providing traditional “preventative” programming and additional “intervention-type” services and supports to community members in crisis given that no



local alternatives exist. Any such move in this direction would require careful planning, consultation, and enhanced resources from the GOA. Such an idea was not unanimously supported by the FCSS directors we spoke with. However, to even discuss it in a way that considers the impacts such a move would have on rural FCSS programs and community members is an example of applying a “rural lens” to an important debate about a large change in policy direction in rural Alberta. Evidence suggests that the time is now to have these conversations to ensure that social service delivery truly works for rural Albertans. The team heard too many examples that speak to the ways it currently does not.

#### **4. Ensure that Social Service Policy in Alberta is Designed with Meaningful Contributions from Rural FCSS Programs**

Building upon the previous point, “applying a rural lens” to policy discussions amounts to more than a study conducted from afar by urban-based policy makers. To apply a rural lens is to meaningfully engage, consult, and listen to the true “experts” in this field: the directors and staff in rural FCSS offices who are living the realities described in this report. Most recent social service-related policy decisions have been made without this type of engagement — a process that goes some way towards understanding how Alberta has ended up in this situation. In fairness, recent work around the creation of a new FCSS Accountability Framework engaged a wide cross section of rural FCSS directors, and one of the goals of the process was to better plot ways to improve coordination with social service agencies located in other ministries. But more must be done by the GOA to intentionally engage rural FCSS offices when making broader social service delivery decisions that will inevitably impact rural communities and, of course, the rural FCSS programs that are actually in the community and will be tasked, formally or informally, with dealing with the on-the-ground consequences.





## \* CONCLUSION

FCSS is a crucial service in towns, villages, and rural communities across Alberta. Relying on the efforts of dedicated staff and supported by municipal decision-makers, FCSS offices in every corner of the province support strong families, connected seniors, and healthy children. In other words, FCSS is a massive part of what makes Alberta's rural communities great.

This report shows that the efforts and passion of FCSS leaders in doing whatever it takes to support everyone in their communities, even the most vulnerable, has been compromised by systematic provincial downloading of responsibility and underfunding of FCSS services. FCSS services are doing more than ever before without the requisite training, funding, and capacity support. This situation leads to unfair pressure on municipalities, unreasonable expectations on FCSS staff, and additional stress to vulnerable rural Albertans.

The RMA will continue to advocate to government for proper funding of FCSS services, and adequate local availability of social services that are the responsibility of the province to deliver. This report tells an indisputable story: FCSS offices are going above and beyond to soften the local impacts of provincial underfunding and service level reductions.