

What Is FCSS?

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) is a unique 80/20 funding partnership between the Government of Alberta and participating municipalities or Métis Settlements. Provincially, the FCSS Program receives its mandate from the *Family and Community Support Services Act* and Regulation.

The Regulation sets out the service requirements that a municipality or Métis Settlement must meet to be eligible for funding. Section 2.1(1)(a) of the FCSS Regulation states: “Services under a program must be of a preventive nature that enhances the social well-being of individuals and families through promotion or intervention strategies provided at the earliest opportunity.” Section 2.1(2)(b) states: “Services under a program must do one or more of the following:

- (i) help people to develop independence, strengthen coping skills and become more resistant to crisis;
- (ii) help people to develop an awareness of social needs;
- (iii) help people to develop interpersonal and group skills which enhance constructive relationships among people;
- (iv) help people and communities to assume responsibility for decisions and actions which affect them;
- (v) provide supports that help sustain people as active participants in the community.”

At the local level, a municipality or Métis Settlement Council chooses whether to establish an FCSS Program and enters into an agreement with the Government of Alberta to jointly fund projects/services. These projects/services depend on community resources, often involving volunteers in management and delivery.

The FCSS philosophy is based on a belief that self-help contributes to a sense of integrity, self-worth and independence. Programs developed are intended to help individuals in their community to adopt healthy lifestyles, thereby improving the quality of life and building the capacity to prevent and/or deal with crisis situations should they arise.

One of the key principles of the FCSS Program is local responsibility for priority setting and resource allocation. Within the parameters of the *FCSS Act* and Regulation, each municipality or Métis Settlement determines how the FCSS funding they receive should be allocated to best meet the needs of their community. Local FCSS Programs are part of the larger provincial Program that collectively helps to ensure that Albertans have access to a strong network of prevention supports.

A number of FCSS resources and publications such as the *FCSS Program Handbook* and the *FCSS Program Advice Inventory Listing* are available on the Alberta Children and Youth Services website at www.child.alberta.ca/home/821.cfm.

Who Participates?

FCSS funding is available to municipalities and Métis Settlements within Alberta that choose to develop and deliver social programs that are preventive in nature. Over ninety-nine per cent (99%) of Albertans reside in communities served by FCSS Programs.

Funding and Reporting

Provincial FCSS grant allocations to municipalities and Métis Settlements in 2010-11 totals \$74.8 million. Funding for FCSS is maintained at the same level as the previous fiscal year. Each participating municipality or Métis Settlement matches its provincial grant with a minimum 20% contribution and is required to submit an annual report to the Ministry detailing local expenditures for funded projects and services that are eligible under FCSS legislation.

Eligible Services

FCSS uses a “people helping people to help themselves” approach and offers a wide range of programs and services at the community level. Please refer to the *FCSS Program Advice Inventory Listing* (included in chapter five of the *FCSS Program Handbook*) for additional information. An eligibility assessment tool is also included in this chapter. The FCSS Program Directory lists projects and services provided by local communities across the province. This Directory is available on the FCSS Association of Alberta website at www.fcssaa.ab.ca.

Following are examples of programs or services offered at the community level through FCSS:

1. Services to assist communities to identify their social needs and develop responses to meet those needs, including:
 - raising public awareness around community issues,
 - developing strategies for community advocacy,
 - developing comprehensive social community plans and initiatives,
 - environmental scans, service reviews, strategic planning, program planning, or
 - in-kind support to community-based groups (until they are able to sustain themselves) such as provision of office space, printing, photocopying, help with preparing proposals, etc.;
2. Services to promote, encourage and support volunteer work in the community, including:
 - recruitment, training and placement services,
 - resources to support volunteers,
 - volunteer recognition, or
 - coordination of volunteer services;
3. Services to inform the public of available services, including:
 - information and referral services,
 - community information directories,
 - newcomer services, or
 - interagency coordination;
4. Services that promote the social development of children and their families, including:
 - parent-child development activities,
 - early childhood development services for children aged 0-6 (excluding child care), or
 - support services for young children aged 6-12;

5. Services that enrich and strengthen family life by developing skills so people can function more effectively within their own environment, including:
 - mentoring programs,
 - parenting and family life education and development programs,
 - programs for single adults and single parents,
 - courses designed to enhance self-awareness and personal growth,
 - individual, family and group counselling services that are educational and not treatment oriented, or
 - youth development and leadership services;

6. Services that enhance the quality of life of the retired and semi-retired, including:
 - home support services,
 - education and information services,
 - coordination of seniors services and programs, or
 - self-help socialization activities.

Ineligible Services

Services provided under a Program must not provide primarily for the recreational needs or leisure time pursuits of individuals, offer direct assistance (including money, food, clothing or shelter) to sustain an individual or family, be primarily rehabilitative in nature, or duplicate services that are ordinarily provided by a government or government agency.

FCSS Association of Alberta

The FCSS Association of Alberta (FCSSAA) is a key partner of the Ministry. Its mission is “to unite and strengthen the FCSS community by representation and advocacy on behalf of member boards.” A 17-member Board of Directors oversees operations. The role of the FCSSAA Board is to identify common concerns and issues related to FCSS; communicate those issues, together with proposed solutions, to other members and to the provincial government; and support communities by developing tools to meet local needs and mandates. The FCSSAA Resource Bank is a resource centre, reference library and communication network for information sharing among FCSS Programs. Funding and support to the Resource Bank is undertaken as a partnership between the FCSSAA and the Ministry. For further information about the FCSSAA, visit its website at www.fcssaa.ab.ca or call (780) 422-0133.

FCSS Program Advisory Team

The FCSS Program Advisory Team (PAT) is a unique joint management partnership between the FCSSAA and Alberta Children and Youth Services. The PAT is composed of representatives from each organization and provides advice on program delivery issues, undertakes joint projects to support and develop the Program, and recommends changes to policies and procedures concerning its administration.

Measuring Outcomes

In 2000, an environmental scan identified that FCSS Programs did not have the capacity to monitor outcomes of program delivery. In 2001, the FCSSAA piloted a “program logic model” with seven local FCSS Programs. Similar to a flowchart, a program logic model provides the basic framework for an evaluation. The overall intent was to provide an opportunity for FCSS service providers to learn the practice, gain an appreciation for and develop the ability to identify outcomes occurring as a result of their services. A further intention was to teach the skill of using the data collected for continuous program improvement and to guide best practices.

The Making a Difference (MAD) Outcome Evaluation System was initiated with two basic components: the capacity to develop program logic models and to support outcome data collection with survey development and analysis tools. Over the years the use and understanding of outcome measurement by FCSS Programs continued to grow and several annual outcome measures reports were produced. Based on feedback obtained through an FCSS Program Review in 2007 as well as feedback from FCSS Directors, a number of gaps and needs were identified in order to continue to build capacity within FCSS Programs to implement outcome measures and the practice of continuous quality improvement.

In spring 2009, a Provincial FCSS Outcome Measures Steering Committee was established to oversee the initiative and encourage the use of outcome measures as an important part of program evaluation by all FCSS Programs. The Steering Committee's first task was to address the gaps and needs identified and develop a work plan and strategies to move the initiative forward. The initiative was renamed the FCSS Outcome Measures Initiative but the basic philosophy and purpose remains unchanged. Outcome statements included in Program Logic Models will continue to be directly linked to specific service requirements identified in the FCSS Regulation.

A number of priorities have been identified, including the development of an FCSS training curriculum, FCSS trainers to provide support and guidance to FCSS Programs, and providing ongoing communication and clear provincial direction so that all FCSS Programs understand the value of collecting outcome measures, what is required and why it is required. The Steering Committee will continue to work on addressing these priorities throughout the coming year.