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Chair: Kate White

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Chair: Kate White
Vice-Chair: Adam Gerle

Members: Linda Moen
Patti McLeod
Justin Ziegler
Doris Anderson
Tyler Porter

Clerk: Logan Ockenden, Clerk of Committees

Witnesses: **Office of the Auditor General of Canada**

Marjolaine Guay, Assistant Auditor General
Markirit Armutlu, Principal
Sean MacLennan, Director

Department of Health and Social Services

Matt King, Deputy Minister
Stephen Doyle, Assistant Deputy Minister, Social Services
Tanya MacKenzie, Director, Family and Children's Services
Tim Darling, Manager, Family and Children's Services
Bobby Prematunga, Senior Program Strategist, Family and Children's Services

EVIDENCE**Whitehorse, Yukon****Monday, May 25, 2026 — 1:00 p.m.**

Chair: I will now call to order this hearing of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

The Public Accounts Committee is established by Standing Order 45(3) of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly. This Standing Order says: “At the commencement of the First Session of each Legislature, a Standing Committee on Public Accounts shall be appointed and the Public Accounts and all reports of the Auditor General shall stand referred automatically and permanently to the said Committee as they become available.”

On December 10, 2025, the Yukon Legislative Assembly adopted Motion No. 6, which established the current Public Accounts Committee. In addition to appointing members to the Committee, the motion stipulated that the Committee shall — and I quote: “Have the power to call for persons, papers, and records and to sit during intersessional periods.”

Today, pursuant to Standing Order 45(3) and Motion No. 6, the Committee will investigate the Auditor General of Canada’s performance audit report on child and family services in Yukon. I would like to thank the witnesses from Health and Social Services for appearing. They are: Matt King, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services; Stephen Doyle, Assistant Deputy Minister, Social Services; Tim Darling, Manager of Family and Children’s Services; Tanya MacKenzie, Director of Family and Children’s Services; and Bobby Prematunga, senior program strategist. Also present are officials from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada. They are: Marjolaine Guay, Assistant Auditor General; Markirit Armutlu, Principal; and Sean MacLennan, Director.

I will now introduce the members of the Public Accounts Committee. I am Kate White, Chair of the Committee and Member of the Legislative Assembly for Takhini; to my left is Adam Gerle, who is the Committee’s Vice-Chair and Member for Porter Creek South; to their left is Justin Ziegler, Member for Riverdale South; to their left is Tyler Porter, Member for Southern Lakes; to their left is Linda Moen, Member for Mountainview; behind me is Patti McLeod, Member for Watson Lake-Ross River-Faro; to their left is Doris Anderson, Member for Porter Creek North; and finally, Debra-Leigh Reti, Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, is joining us virtually.

To begin today’s proceedings, Marjolaine Guay will make an opening statement on behalf of the Office of the Auditor General. Matt King will then be invited to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Services. Committee members will ask questions that the Committee has devised collectively. The questions each member will ask are not just their personal questions on a particular subject but those for the entire Committee.

Before we start the hearing, I would like to remind the Committee members and witnesses to wait until they are recognized by the Chair before speaking and to remind those joining us in the gallery that you are welcome to take notes, but please do not use electronic devices.

So, we will now proceed with the opening statement from the Office of the Auditor General.

Marjolaine Guay: Good afternoon, Madam Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee to discuss the Auditor General’s report on child and family services in Yukon, which was tabled in March.

I would like to begin by respectfully acknowledging all of the Yukon First Nations and recognizing that we are meeting on the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta’an Kwäch’än Council.

I am accompanied today by Markirit Armutlu, Principal, who is responsible for the audit, and Sean MacLennan, who led the audit team.

The Department of Health and Social Services is responsible for managing and administrating the *Child and Family Services Act* and protecting children from abuse and harm. Protecting and supporting children is among the most critical responsibilities of any government.

The audit examined whether the department was providing child protection services in accordance with legislative requirements and established standards. We found serious gaps across a range of services, from the department’s response to reports of suspected harm to completing investigations and following up on the safety and well-being of children in care.

Overall, we concluded that the department failed to provide timely, effective, and inclusive services to protect vulnerable children and their families. In 37 percent of the reports of children at risk of harm, the department did not assess the need for protective intervention within the required 24-hour period. Of the cases that required further investigation, 41 percent were not completed within the required 30 days.

We also found that the department did not meet key screening and monitoring requirements when children were placed with extended family members or in foster homes. For example, criminal record checks were not completed for adults in extended family homes in 22 percent of the cases examined.

The audit also identified significant shortfalls in required face-to-face contact. In 74 percent of the cases involving children in the department’s care, the department did not meet the minimum requirement for monthly contact, with gaps extending up to 14 months. For young adults receiving support services for independent living, the department did not maintain monthly face-to-face contact in any of the cases reviewed.

In group homes, which are primarily intended for children aged 12 and older, we found that about one-third of the children were under the age of six and that many were living with disabilities. These children require more supervision. Given that the ratio of children to caregivers was based on children being 12 years of age and older, this made it harder for staff to provide effective supervision and it increased safety risks for all children. In addition, many group home staff did not complete or update training in areas such as Indigenous awareness and health and safety, including non-violent crisis intervention. The Department of Health and Social Services’ responsibility to provide for at-risk Yukon children and families also depends on effectively managing financial and human resources.

We found that the department had not completed a comprehensive assessment of the resources needed to deliver services under the *Child and Family Services Act*. As of March 2025, only 62 percent of social worker and supervisor positions were staffed, resulting in significant shortfalls in key front-line roles. Finally, we found that although the act requires the department to report to the minister every three years on its compliance with child and family services, it had been 10 years since a report was provided.

Compliance gaps pose ongoing risks to the safety and well-being of vulnerable children and families. Considered together, these findings point to systemic weaknesses in governance, oversight, and service delivery. They reflect a child and family services system that is not effectively protecting the young people who depend on it most. The Department of Health and Social Services must take concrete and sustained actions to strengthen its support for the safety and well-being of children, youth, and their families in Yukon.

Madam Chair, this concludes my opening remarks. We would be pleased to answer any questions that the Committee may have.

Matt King: Thank you, Chair. Members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, good afternoon. I too would like to recognize that we are on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee today regarding the Auditor General's report on child and family services in the Yukon.

I acknowledge the work of the Office of the Auditor General in conducting this audit and thank our staff, First Nations, Indigenous partners, Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office, and other stakeholders who have contributed to this process with a focus on the well-being, safety, and rights of children and youth in the Yukon. The findings in the Auditor General's report are serious. The department accepts the findings and the recommendations of the Auditor General. The operational gaps detailed in the report, from concerning delays and safety assessments, missing face-to-face wellness visits, documentation backlogs, and criminal record checks for foster placements are unacceptable. The children, youth, and families who rely on our services deserve a system that is protective, reliable, adaptive, and centred on children, youth, families, and caregivers in need of support and intervention. The Auditor General's report identifies that the department failed to consistently deliver that standard of care, and as deputy minister, I take full systemic responsibility for the administrative, structural, and oversight shortfalls that led to these outcomes.

I want to give this Committee our assurance that our team is committed to system-level and operational improvements as we work to address the findings and the recommendations by the Auditor General. The audit covered operations up to March 31, 2025, and since that time, the department has made some progress. This includes attention to immediate actions related to caregiver screening requirements and reviews. Reviews of active caregiver files have been completed and work is underway to address identified gaps and complete outstanding requirements.

The department has updated and clarified policies related to child protection intake, contact standards, plans of care, and

supports for young adults transitioning from care while continuing to strengthen monitoring and consistency across practice areas. Additional work is underway to strengthen monitoring and compliance processes through improvement to the case management system, development of internal reporting tools, enhanced supervision processes, and branch-wide training and policy review work.

In response to concerns regarding group homes and supports for younger children and children living with disabilities, the department has begun work to review policies, assess staffing and supervision requirements, strengthen training oversight, and implement recommendations from external subject matter experts.

Additional staffing supports have also been added within transitional support services to support child development planning, staff training, and policy development for group homes. The department is also working to improve training oversight and accountability through the adoption of a learning management system to better track and monitor completion of mandatory training requirements.

Critically, we committed to reforming our models through collaborative partnerships with Yukon First Nation governments and the Council of Yukon First Nations so that systemic reform is inclusive, culturally appropriate, and structurally sound — specifically highlighting the importance of cultural continuity, connection, and culturally appropriate planning and supports. The department has continued discussions with Yukon First Nations, the Council of Yukon First Nations, and out-of-territory Indigenous governing bodies to establish processes for the completion of cultural plans for children in care. This work remains ongoing and will continue to require partnership, collaboration, and sustained effort.

The department also recognizes that public confidence in child welfare services depends not only on policies and systems but on the experiences of children, youth, families, caregivers, and communities interacting with these services. That includes ensuring children and youth are safe, supported, heard, connected to their culture and community, and able to access appropriate services within a timely and consistent way.

Some of these issues are long-standing and reflect broad challenges that are not unique to the Yukon, including workforce shortages affecting child welfare systems across Canada, caregiver shortages, increasing complexity of care needs, and the ongoing impacts of colonial systems on Indigenous children, youth, and families. Those realities are challenges we must face in order to improve outcomes for children and youth in the Yukon. The department remains committed to working collaboratively with Yukon First Nations, Indigenous governing bodies, service providers, caregivers, oversight bodies, and community partners to strengthen our services and improve accountability and outcomes. Our dedicated front-line professionals work under immense pressure, and we appreciate their efforts as we focus on structural and policy improvement, recruitment and retention, and provide staff with the conditions they need to succeed.

I want to thank and acknowledge the important contributions and dedication of our staff across Family and Children's Services, transitional support services, and partner organizations who

continue to work in highly complex environments with the realities of workforce instability.

We would be pleased to answer the Committee's questions.

Chair: Just a reminder to witnesses, if you could just raise your hand or just give me some kind of visual cue, I will identify you in response.

Adam Gerle: My first are general questions for the officials of the Office of the Auditor General of Canada. The first is: Can you provide a brief overview of the audit process?

Marjolaine Guay: Performance audits are planned, performed, and reported in accordance with professional auditing standards and policies of the Office of the Auditor General of Canada. Audits are conducted by qualified auditors who establish audit objectives and criteria. They gather evidence; they report both on positive and negative findings; they conclude against the established audit objectives; and they recommend improvements where there are significant differences between criteria and assessed performance. Finally, performance audits do not question the merits of government policies; rather, they examine government's management practices, controls, and reporting system based on its own public administration policies and their best practices.

Adam Gerle: Could you summarize the key findings of your report and what you see as the most urgent issues?

Marjolaine Guay: The key findings of our report include: assessing the need for protective intervention within the mandated 24-hour window for all child protection cases; meeting minimum contact requirements for children in care and young adults receiving support services; and completing criminal record checks for all adults in extended family and foster homes where children could be placed.

Adam Gerle: Could you outline the scope of this audit and what was included?

Markirit Armutlu: The audit involved an examination of the actions of the Department of Health and Social Services following key areas of child and family services. So, these include, for example, the meeting of responsibilities for the protection and support of at-risk children, youth, and young adults and families in compliance with the *Child and Family Services Act*. In addition, it looked at collaborating with Indigenous partners to promote culturally appropriate services for Indigenous youth, children, and families involved in the Family and Children's Services branch. Finally, it also looked at managing human and financial resource capacity, including staff training, meeting reporting requirements, and information systems and data needs.

Now, the audit work itself included a review and analysis of five types of case files. These included child protection, children in care, foster homes, extended family homes, and files of young adults receiving post-care support services from the department. The audit basically took a representative sampling of these files in its conclusions. The audit period itself covered a period from November 30, 2022 to March 31, 2025. Our conclusions in our report address the activities within that period.

Adam Gerle: If there are a few key messages you want the public and decision-makers to take away from this report, what would they be?

Marjolaine Guay: Thank you for the question. The key messages of our report include: improving the management of human and financial resources to fill key front-line social worker and supervisor positions; addressing safety risks to children placed in group homes by updating group home policies so they reflect the needs of children residing there and ensuring group home staff have completed all required training; and meeting reporting requirements in compliance with the act to the minister.

Adam Gerle: My next few questions are for the Department of Health and Social Services, so for the officials.

My first is regarding the October 2025 policy change. The auditors noted that the department removed the requirement for young adults to participate in education or employment and replaced mandatory monthly contact with an individual-specific circumstances standard. The audit had already found 100-percent failure on monthly contact and 93-percent failure on monitoring participation in their sample.

On what evidence or consultations was this decision based? How does removing a standard the department was already failing to meet represent an improvement in service delivery?

Matt King: In 2022, in consultation with Yukon First Nations and the Council of Yukon First Nations, Family and Children's Services removed the requirement that young adults participate in education or employment in order to receive services. In 2022, Yukon Government amended the *Child and Family Services Act* to expand eligibility criteria and services provided under post-care agreements. During discussions about legislative amendments and subsequent policy development, Yukon First Nations, the Council of Yukon First Nations, and the Department of Health and Social Services acknowledged that most vulnerable young adults who leave the child protection system are not always ready or able to engage in employment or education. By having this as a requirement, we may further marginalize the most vulnerable; therefore, we collectively made the choice to remove this requirement. Similarly, during the policy development process, officials arrived at the conclusion that we can't treat all young adults in the same way, that their needs and capacities vary and we must meet each young adult where they are at.

Previously, Family and Children's Services policy required that workers contact young adults to monitor their compliance with post-care agreements within reason but at least biweekly phone contact and monthly face-to-face contact. When the policy was amended in 2022, the program moved away from contact every two weeks by phone and monthly face-to-face contact because it was meant to determine if the young adults were in school or at work. When the Office of the Auditor General reviewed the Family and Children's Services policy manual, they discovered that the branch had not removed reference to biweekly phone contact and monthly face-to-face contact. In response, Family and Children's Services removed the outdated policy and further emphasized that workers are expected to establish contact standards tailored to the needs of each young adult.

Adam Gerle: The new contact standard is based on individual circumstances. What mechanism ensures that this is

applied consistently, and who is accountable when the contact is insufficient?

Stephen Doyle: Consistence is provided through the post-care agreement's need assessment and the case plan, which specifies the frequency of contact needed. Family and Children's Services has taken several steps to ensure that staff maintain face-to-face contact with young adults. In January 2026, Family and Children's Services developed resource materials and delivered information sessions to help workers understand what is considered face-to-face contact and how often contact must be made with young adults.

Based on the Office of the Auditor General's recommendations to better use our electronic case management system, Family and Children's Services is in the process of fine-tuning an electronic report that displays whether caseworkers are meeting the contact standards. Moving forward, Family and Children's Services' internal compliance reviews will include post-care cases for young adults.

The department has added a supervisor to the team of caseworkers responsible for post-care agreements in Whitehorse to give guidance and support caseworkers in meeting legal and policy requirements. We are also working to hire another caseworker. Ultimately, the department is accountable when contact is insufficient. We are hopeful that the training, electronic reporting, supervisor and caseworker hires, and internal compliance reporting provide increased safeguards against insufficient contact standards.

Adam Gerle: My next question relates to paragraph 21 in the *Child and Family Services in Yukon* report. \$125,000 was paid to eight young adults with no post-care agreement in place for periods of two to 18 months. My multi-part question to this is: What was the timeline for these payments? Who had authority to approve these payments, and why did existing financial controls not flag them? What were these payments intended for? How were they distributed, and why only to these eight young adults?

Matt King: When providing specific services to children, youth, and families under the CFSA, best practice is to follow process that involves first assessing for need and then case planning around the identified need and finally creating a service agreement to capture case-plan items that require specific services and/or funding requirements or commitments. While the act does allow for services and associated payments to be provided in the absence of an agreement, best practice is to have an agreement in place that represents a shared understanding between the department and the individual or family receiving the services. The timeline for these payments made without an agreement is from September 2023 to February 2025. Payments entered in the electronic case management system must be reviewed and approved by supervisors and managers depending on the payment amount. The payments in question were approved by supervisors and managers with the appropriate signing authority levels prior to funding being released. The electronic case management system does not allow payments to go out otherwise, as those signing authority limits are built into the system to ensure compliance.

These payments were for essential expenses such as rent, utilities, groceries, and health and medical needs. All payments were distributed by cheque or direct deposit. The financial controls did not flag an issue, because agreements are not required for the director to provide the services. During the legislative review, it came to light that administrative tasks associated with the agreements under the *Child and Family Services Act*, such as renewing agreements in a timely manner before an agreement expires, could be a barrier to service and result in individuals not receiving those services because they were unable to meet with a social worker in order to sign the appropriate documentation. In response, the *Child and Family Services Act* was amended to give the director the ability to deliver services before entering into an agreement.

In recent policy revisions, Family and Children's Services has removed the requirement for a young adult to meet with their social worker in person to sign an agreement, and they can instead confirm in other ways through other electronic means, like text or e-mail, if they wish to enter a subsequent agreement until they are able to meet with the worker in person. Agreements were in place for the remaining 23 young adults in the sample when they received the payments.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I'll continue on with questions for the department. What support was provided to these youth related to the funding?

Tanya MacKenzie: In general, the caseworker is expected to support the young adult with budgeting and ensure that funding is spent appropriately. As part of the support, the caseworker can also help the youth get to appointments associated with the funding. The caseworker does have the ability to send funding directly to service providers instead of directly to the young adult to pay for these services the youth is receiving if there are any concerns with the money directly going to the youth.

Debra-Leigh Reti: What was done since to make sure the system is improved and better tracking and approval systems are in place?

Tanya MacKenzie: Updated training has been delivered to the team responsible for delivering these services to ensure there is a greater emphasis on the need for assessment, case planning, agreements, and processes; however, the director requires the ability to deliver these services to young adults in certain circumstances when the young adult is not easily available to meet with their caseworker to sign such agreements.

The appropriate supervisor and manager approvals were already in place for these payments. We do acknowledge that the director's powers to deliver services without agreements should be used sparingly. Again, we are hopeful that by including post-care agreements in future internal compliance reviews and reports, it will allow us to better track our rate for completing agreements with young adults when services are being delivered.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I have a couple of questions in regard to accountability for the department. In paragraph 65, the last compliance report submitted to the minister was in 2016. The law requires one every three years. Who was responsible for

producing these reports, and why was this obligation not met for nearly a decade?

Matt King: The director, according to section 185(2) of the *Child and Family Services Act*, is responsible for producing the reports. From 2010 to 2016, the department hired an external consultant to help complete the annual internal compliance reports which were submitted to the minister at that time. In 2016, the department elected to hire in-house quality assurance staff and build internal capacity to conduct these reviews. Due to recruitment and retention challenges, Health and Social Services did not have qualified analysts in place at that time to complete the reports, and the plan to bring that in house was not realized.

Most recently, on April 30, 2026, the department submitted an internal compliance review for fiscal year 2022-23 to the Minister of Health and Social Services. We are in the process of ensuring that we can complete this work for the internal compliance reviews for 2025-26, 2026-27, and 2027-28 for submission to the minister. That would likely be through a combination of consultant services with in-house staff capacity.

Debra-Leigh Reti: In paragraph 65, internal non-compliance checks covering 2017 to 2021 were completed but shared only with the branch director; the minister never saw them. Who made the decision not to escalate these findings to the minister and why?

Matt King: We do not have the documentation for the rationale as to why that decision was made at that time for the period from 2017 to 2021. Going forward, Family and Children's Services will meet its obligations and plan to ensure that the minister receives the reports in a timely way.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Thank you for those answers.

I do have some questions for the Auditor General. On page 26, the formal October 2025 notification to "... senior management within the Department of Health and Social Services of the need to take immediate action to address those important concerns, including the lack of monitoring of children in care and those receiving child protection services; the increased numbers of younger children and a large portion of children living with disabilities in group homes; and poor compliance with mandatory safety training for front-line staff" is described as arising from concerns identified early in the audit that, in the OAG's view, increased the risk of harm to children. This is not standard procedure.

What is the threshold for such a notification, and what does it use here tell us about the severity of what you found?

Marjolaine Guay: When the OAG identifies risks during our audit work that, in our view, require immediate attention from the department, we provide formal notification in advance of tabling the report. This is so that the department can take the required actions to address these risks while the audit work is being finalized.

For this audit, based on the gaps we identified in case management and ongoing contact, we were concerned that there were children and youth who did not receive the protection and services that they needed and were entitled to

under the *Child and Family Services Act* and that these children and youth could be at risk.

Debra-Leigh Reti: What was the rationale behind the list of areas scoped out of the audit in regard to: (a) child and family services delivered by Yukon First Nations, Indigenous governing bodies, and other partners and interested parties, including those funded by Indigenous Services Canada; (b) grants and contributions provided by the department to third-party service providers; (c) adoptions; (d) youth justice programs; and (e) professional practices of social workers?

Markirit Armutlu: I will very briefly address each one of those five areas that you listed.

For the area in relation to the child and family services delivered by Yukon First Nations, Indigenous governing bodies, and other partners and interested parties, including those funded by Indigenous Services Canada, the OAG mandate is to conduct audits of the territorial Government of Yukon. The OAG does not have the authority to audit programs and services delivered by Yukon First Nations, Indigenous governing bodies, or other partners and interested parties. Through its mandate to audit federal government departments, the office could examine programs and services delivered by Indigenous Services Canada in future reports.

Regarding grants and contributions provided by the department to third party services providers, according to the financial information provided by the Department of Health and Social Services during the planning phase of the audit, 90 percent of grants and contributions provided by the department to third party service providers were to support caregivers and children in out-of-home care. So, while we did conduct extensive examination of caregiver homes and child-in-care files, we did not examine the compliance with financial authorities for these payments.

The question around adoptions — now, here, according to the information provided by the department during the planning phase of our audit, the number of adoptions that occurred in Yukon between 2014 and 2024 was 21. This amounts to about two adoptions annually. Further, 20 of the 21 children who were adopted remained in Yukon and the remaining child was placed in adoption with extended family in another province. Given the relatively very low number of adoptions occurring in Yukon annually, we decided to focus the scope on other areas of risk. I hope that answers that one.

With youth justice programs, while the program is under the responsibility of the Family and Children's Services branch, it was scoped out in this audit to focus on child protection, children in care of the department, young adults receiving post-care services, and other core child and family services programs. Youth justice programs may be considered for future audits of child corrections. That is something that we could certainly consider in the future.

Finally, with regard to professional practices of social workers, the OAG examines the government's management practices, controls, and reporting systems based on its own public administration policies and on best practices. We do not question the professional judgment and decisions of social workers when they were taken in compliance with these

requirements. Now, at the time of our audit, the Government of Yukon was also contemplating creating a regulatory body to oversee social worker registration, licensing, and adherence to professional standards in Yukon. Where this was a policy decision, we did not include the process in the scope of our audit.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Thank you for those answers.

I have a question for the department. What concrete actions were taken in the days and weeks following that notification?

Matt King: Following the notification of the five areas that were flagged as requiring urgent attention, the department put in place several measures to address these gaps.

The first area requiring urgent attention was with respect to foster homes that were not meeting the minimum screening requirements. In response, the department began to review all screening requirements for both active foster caregivers and extended family caregivers. Family and Children's Services completed this review in March 2026, and work is currently underway to have these screening requirements put into the filing system. As of May 14, 2026, 42 of the 154 caregivers, or 27 percent, do not have their minimum screening requirements on file. The team at Family and Children's Services continues this work and plans to meet our October 2026 target to have all of the minimum requirements completed and on file.

The second area was with respect to group homes operating at overcapacity while caring for very young children and children living with disabilities, with many staff lacking the mandatory safety training. In 2026-27, the budget for Health and Social Services includes an increase to help offset the rising costs and offer 24 two-year term positions to auxiliary-on-call workers as of May 21, 2026. Offers have been made to 18 individuals and the department is working to fill the remaining six term positions. We will continue recruiting auxiliary-on-call workers to alleviate some of this pressure. In April 2026, the department hired two child development support workers with expertise in regulating childcare centres to help group home workers care for young children, including building skills training and policy development as well as to help implement child plans from the Child Development Centre for children under the age of five.

A third area is with respect to child protection, children in care, and transitional support services and how there was minimal or no monitoring of the well-being of children, youth, or young adults to ensure their safety or check-ins with families.

In October 2025, the department updated policies related to these contact standards. In January 2026, the program built on these policy updates by creating resource materials and delivered information sessions to help workers meet their contact standards. We have started to develop an interactive electronic report based on case management systems that reports and tracks which children, youth, young adults, and families are receiving the appropriate contact from their workers.

The fourth area was with respect to the lack of processes and tools to enable the completion of cultural plans for Indigenous children. In 2022, when the department developed our policy and processes on cultural plans with Yukon First Nations and the Council of Yukon First Nations, officials agreed that Yukon First Nations-led cultural plans for children

in care is the best practice, with support and collaboration from our Family and Children's Services social workers. Staffing and capacity barriers have delayed developing cultural plans for some Yukon First Nation children to address the gap. We sought permission from Yukon First Nations to hire the Council of Yukon First Nations to help develop cultural plans.

As of April 14, 2026, the department has agreed-upon processes with 11 Yukon First Nations and four out-of-territory Indigenous governing bodies to complete the cultural plans. For fiscal year 2025-26, the Council of Yukon First Nations and the department worked together to develop and implement cultural plans for 52 children in out-of-home care from five Yukon First Nations and three out-of-territory Indigenous governing bodies.

The fifth area was with respect to the lack of tri-annual reporting to the minister. On April 30, 2026, the Family and Children's Services director submitted an internal compliance report for fiscal year 2022-23 to the minister. This will be a compliance and accountability priority going forward, building from the Office of the Auditor General's audit period, with our next three-year report covering the years from 2025-26 to 2027-28.

Justin Ziegler: My next questions are going to be about group homes. The report states in paragraph 31 — and I quote: "We found that the majority of departmental policies that applied to group homes were outdated, having been approved in 2007. These policies had not been reviewed or updated by the department to align with the *Child and Family Services Act*, which was adopted in 2010 or with the 2022 amendments."

Why were these group home policies not updated to match current obligations?

Stephen Doyle: We acknowledge that many of our group home policies are outdated and need significant updates. Over the years, the department has made efforts to update the group home policy manual but has not been able to complete this work due to competing priorities.

Based on the Office of the Auditor General's findings and the increase of young children in the group homes, the department has identified the group home policies as a top priority. Policy work, resources, and subject matter experts have been identified internally to support this work. We are also exploring contracting some of this work to ensure that we can complete this manual as quickly as we possibly can.

Justin Ziegler: About paragraph 32 — quote: "The amendments to the act contributed to some group homes caring for children significantly younger than contemplated in approved policies, potentially straining resources and increasing risk ... We found that as of March 31, 2025, there were 41 children living in group homes, of which 61% (25) were under 12 years old, and 29% (12) were less than 6 years old. The youngest child was 18 months old and had been placed at a group home with siblings."

What additional measures were put in place to ensure that children under 12 were safe in facilities designed for those 12 and older?

Tanya MacKenzie: To address the increase in children under the age of 12 in group homes, we've implemented the following measures: In 2024, we introduced settle shifts, which is an additional shift that increases the minimum number of staff

in the group homes to three from 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. This allows support during busy periods in the homes when children return from school and through to bedtime. Additional staff are also assigned to homes on an as-needed basis, especially when certain children need a worker specifically assigned to them.

Home staff assigned to homes with younger children receive Handle With Care training, which is designed to help parents and caregivers with managing challenging behaviours in young children from birth to age six. All group home staff are also required to complete Safe Sleep training, which teaches safe sleep practices for infants between birth to age two.

Whenever possible, we reassign children to certain homes based on their ages to ensure that younger children with similar developmental needs are placed together and staff with specialized training are assigned to these children.

Over the course of last summer, a childcare centre subject matter expert conducted assessments of group homes to determine if they were appropriate for the children's developmental needs. We are in the process of implementing these recommendations currently and plan to have them completed by October of 2026.

Justin Ziegler: Do you know if the group home policies were updated to reflect these changes?

Tanya MacKenzie: The minister has determined that Family and Children's Services policies will be publicly available upon request and that we will be making them available online. We are currently updating the policy manual as we speak and working with our specially assigned policy team that works to support these updates right now.

Justin Ziegler: I guess you already answered my next question, which was: Is there a commitment to ensure that policies governing group home placements going forward are publicly available? I believe that the answer is yes.

I will move on to the next question. How long was management aware that infants and toddlers were being placed in facilities designed for teenagers, and why were policies never updated before that?

Stephen Doyle: Management is always aware anytime an infant or toddler is placed in a group home, since the decision to place any child in a group home must be approved by a manager. This issue is reflective of capacity issues as opposed to a policy issue. Policy 13.12.1 of the *Child and Family Services Act* policy manual states that children under 10 years of age are not to be placed in group homes except in exceptional circumstances where an extended family caregiver or a foster caregiver is not available and that even after placing the child in a group home, staff must continue to find an alternative caregiver as quickly as possible. However, the Yukon, like many provinces and territories across the country, is dealing with a caregiver shortage. In the absence of extended family caregivers and foster caregivers, our only remaining option is to place children in group homes.

Our legislation and policies identified that group homes are the last resort. We are legally obligated to explore all options with the extended family caregivers and individuals in the community before group homes. Our intention is to work with Yukon First Nations and caregivers to update the community caregiver program to make it more appealing to prospective and

current caregivers and thereby take pressure off of the group homes.

Justin Ziegler: I guess you already answered this one, but I would like to still ask the question: What has been done since?

Stephen Doyle: To reduce the number of children in group homes, the department requires that staff regularly connect with extended family members to find individuals suitable to care for these children. Additionally, we have ongoing caregiver recruitment initiatives such as hosting community visits with Yukon First Nations and social media and radio ads to find foster caregivers.

Recently, the department changed the occurrence of meetings to review children in group homes from biweekly to weekly to increase oversight on case planning and find community placements for these children.

In the coming weeks, the department plans to meet with Yukon First Nation government leadership to discuss creative community-based solutions for these children in group homes.

Chair: If I may, a follow-up to that — given the fact that it has been identified that there is a shortage of caregivers, what work is being done by current and past caregivers — so, folks who have been within the foster family — how are you going to engage and survey them? Because, as you can imagine, folks have a lot of opinions about what has worked and what hasn't worked. So, how will you make sure that folks who aren't currently in that system have an opportunity for feedback, and how will that feedback change recruitment or processes or supports going forward?

Stephen Doyle: We intend to directly engage with community caregivers. We acknowledge that we haven't done significant engagement as of yet, but that is next on our agenda after meeting with Yukon First Nation leadership to ensure that community caregivers, current and potentially past, have a voice so that we can hear their perspectives, as they are the folks on the ground delivering these services, so that we can work to improve the system. As noted earlier, we are intending to review the community caregiver program effectively from top to bottom and see if there are ways that we can improve the services that are delivered for all parties.

Chair: Just to follow up, I think it's important to note that targeting past caregivers — so, folks who did go through the process, who did care for children but who have chosen to opt out of the process — is an important one. I note here that I believe that there should be targeted outreach to folks who were involved either in the foster or in the extended family care and who are no longer there. I will note that in hopes that there is a targeted outreach.

Stephen Doyle: Yes, I would agree with that — that it would be part of the engagement plan with community caregivers.

Justin Ziegler: Now, about paragraph 34 and the department response to recommendation 42, which is on page 29 of the report — no formal staff-to-child ratio exists. The informal one-to-four ratio was never reassessed despite much younger children and children with disabilities now living in these homes. The department's own response promises a ratio analysis by June 2026, which is one week from now, but describes nothing being done in the meantime.

My question is: What is being done right now to protect these children while the review is ongoing?

Matt King: The department is undertaking an analysis to determine the appropriate staff-to-child ratio, as noted, to meet the timelines in the Auditor General management response, which is end of June, in order to inform budget decisions for 2027-28. Meanwhile, the branch continues to assign additional staff to the homes based on identified needs, especially during busy periods. Family and Children's Services has introduced the additional shift to increase the minimum number of staff in the home to three from 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. to support busy periods in the home when children return from school and until bedtime. Additional staff are also assigned to homes as needed based on children's needs and the requirement for specialized workers.

Two child development support workers are expected to help train the group home workers to meet the needs of young children with disabilities as well as to support group home staff to implement individual case plans for young children from the Child Development Centre. Our goal is to further enhance safety and promote healthy development of the children by implementing the recommendations from the assessments conducted by the Child Development Centre subject matter expert.

Chair: Just to follow up on that, when we talk about the increase of caregivers, can you give us an example? For example, if we are talking about children under 12, can you give us an overview? If there's one house, can you give us the number of children and the number of caregivers so that the ratio is better understood — so how that works out?

Tanya MacKenzie: I will give you an example of one of our homes currently. It is called Haskap Place. We have a large sibling group that is currently living in that home. The number of children is six. Ages — I would have to reflect back to my colleague. I believe that they are under the age of eight. He will just double-check to confirm.

What we have done in that home is that we have assigned a minimum of three staff at all times for those children. We have also increased our capacity to be able to do individual case planning and identification through needs assessments for each of those children. So, for children in that specific home — for the younger children who may need more one-on-one support, we have added in those additional shifts for when the infants are awake, obviously. We have additional staff added to the complement of three during the day. We also have a supervisor who is on staff and a case manager who is on staff during the day upwards of 5:00. So, at any one time with those specific six children in Haskap Place, during the day, there is often upwards of five adults in the home, and then in the evenings and nighttime, we have the settle shift with three — and I can confer, but I believe that there are two individual adult staff on overnights, but that would start at about 11:00 p.m. I'll just confirm with my colleague here.

I am confirming the ages of the children. Actually, the children's ages are two, four, six, seven, nine, and 12.

My response still stands correct in terms of the number of adults in the home at that time.

So, that is sort of one of our current homes. We obviously have a number of homes with a variety of numbers of children and ages in those homes. But we definitely have worked really

hard over the last year, I would suggest, to ensure that we are looking at the individual child's case planning needs and addressing the needs of the individual child through increased staffing to be able to respond to their needs.

So, that is just one example.

Chair: To follow up on that, for the very small infants — for example, early childhood education is important for socialization and learning. Do children within Family and Children's Services in group home situations have access to early learning? So, are they going to daycares or early childhood education centres?

Tanya MacKenzie: The answer to that is yes. They do have access to those depending on the age of the child. So, most of the children over the age of one, typically, are engaged in early learning centres. Just like Deputy Minister King has highlighted, we are very lucky to have experienced early learning and childcare inspectors who have historically worked for us monitoring childcare centres and working very closely with the Child Development Centre. We are using their expertise to help, in addition, to supplement the training that is offered to the staff who are specifically working with these younger children. So, the answer to that question is yes.

Justin Ziegler: About paragraph 38 of the report now: "During our audit period, we found that the department identified 37 serious and 14 critical incidents involving children in out-of-home care. We examined all the records of these incidents included in the department's incident management system and found that while the initial safety of the children involved was confirmed by the department, it failed to meet other important incident management requirements. For example, we found that 12 of the 14 critical incidents required outcome reports; however, 10 of the 12 outcome reports, designed in part to identify areas for improvement, were not completed." And this is in the report.

My question is: Assuming that these reports are required today, who is responsible for making sure that they are done?

Stephen Doyle: The Family and Children's Services' lead investigator responsible for an incident investigation and the manager assigned to oversee the incident management are responsible for completing the requirements, including submitting any outcome reports to the director. The director is responsible for reviewing and approving the outcome reports.

In November 2025, the department assigned the Family and Children's Services' intake and assessment manager to oversee incident management and report progress to the director. We are hopeful that by assigning a single manager to track the incident management, we can identify which incident management tasks are not completed in a timely manner and put in place the appropriate resources to support the lead investigator and an assigned manager.

Tyler Porter: I do have some questions to ask the department, one — starting with community-based care homes: How can the department expand extended care agreements and support the development of community-based care homes in remote and rural communities so that children, youth, and vulnerable individuals can remain connected to their families, culture, and communities instead of being relocated to group homes outside of the community?

Tanya MacKenzie: We recognize the importance of extended family members and the pivotal role that they can play in ensuring that children remain close to family, community, and culture as we work with their parents to address whatever led to the children not being able to live with their parents.

The department's efforts in increasing supports to family caregivers from 2017 to 2019 to bring them to parity with foster caregivers resulted in a significant decrease in the number of children in government care. Reviewing the compensation model for caregivers is on our agenda. As mentioned earlier, when we engage with Yukon First Nation leadership, this will be a key topic of discussion. We welcome input from communities and Yukon First Nations on what they require from us to ensure that children and youth will remain in their community.

We have ongoing caregiver recruitment initiatives, such as hosting community visits with Yukon First Nations and social media and radio ads, to find caregivers. These community visits are opportunities for us to engage with the community, share information, dismiss myths and misconceptions around caregiving, build relationships, and show our commitment to keeping children in their community. We are hopeful that a more comprehensive caregiver training program than what is delivered currently will give individuals the skills required to care for children involved in the child protection system.

We are working to schedule consultants to visit Whitehorse this summer and train our FCS staff to deliver a caregiver training program that is widely used across the country. This training helps caregivers meet the needs of children who are placed in their home. Following the training, our staff will then train and work with caregivers, including extended family members who are interested in caregiving.

Chair: If I may follow up — so, this question came from outside of Whitehorse — so rural Yukon predominantly, in First Nation communities — about whether or not there was a willingness for Yukon Government to work with the nation to establish a safe place within a community — so, not necessarily identifying foster homes but working with the community to identify a separate plan. We just want to know that there's a willingness to work at other solutions or to work with nations and communities, for example, to find alternative solutions.

Stephen Doyle: Yes, absolutely, there is a willingness to do so.

Tyler Porter: I am going to jump to the recommendations in the report, starting with recommendation 1, which references protective services, foster homes, and group homes. That is cited in paragraphs 11 to 14, 27 to 29, and 31 to 34.

It was reported that over one-third of harm reports were not assessed within 24 hours, 41 percent of investigations were not completed within 30 days, criminal record checks were missing in 22 percent of extended family homes, 58 percent of foster homes were missing annual reviews, and group home policies from 2007 were never updated. The department response promises a compliance tracking plan by December 2026, foster and family home screening completed by October 2026, group home policy updates by March 2027, and a ratio analysis by June 2026.

My question is — the department promises a compliance tracking plan by December 2026, nearly half a year from now. Given that children are in these homes today, what specific steps are being taken between now and December to address the screening gaps already identified?

Stephen Doyle: Following conversations with the Auditor General and consultation within our own legal services, we changed our policy based on section 23 of the *Child and Family Services Act* in 2025 to ensure that assessment must start and finish within 24 hours of receiving a child protection report. Prior to that date, our interpretation had been different.

Until the compliance tracking plan is implemented, we are using alternative methods to ensure that criminal record checks are in place for all foster caregivers and extended family caregivers. We have reviewed all active caregivers to determine which ones are missing the minimum screening requirements, which include criminal record checks. Workers reviewed each case manually and discovered that 42 out of 150 caregivers — which is 27 percent — do not currently have their minimum screening requirements. We are working with these caregivers to complete these requirements and have them on file by October 2026.

Similarly, we have reviewed all active foster caregiver files by hand to determine that 38 out of 75 foster caregivers — 50 percent — do not have their annual reviews up to date; however, work is underway to complete these annual reviews by October 2026.

We have put in place several interim measures to support the group homes until policies are updated. These measures include: a budget increase to hire additional staff and retain auxiliary-on-call staff; settle shifts, as mentioned before, and additional staff assigned to group homes based on children's individual needs assessments to gauge the safety and appropriateness of the homes for the healthy development of children; and hiring two child development social workers to support group home staff with caring for young children and children with disabilities, including supporting staff training to be better suited to supporting children in those age groups.

Tyler Porter: The foster home annual review backlog states that 58 percent have not been completed. It is supposed to be cleared by October 2026.

How many of those overdue reviews have already been completed since the audit ended in March 2025, and what is the current completion rate?

Tanya MacKenzie: Out of the approximately 75 foster caregivers in the Yukon, 38 do not have an up-to-date annual review, meaning that 50 percent are not done. In October 2025, the Office of the Auditor General shared an early draft of their report with us. Since then, we have been able to have completed 17 additional foster home annual reviews that were overdue, and we are currently on track to complete the remaining 37 by October 2026.

Tyler Porter: Group home policies haven't been updated since 2007, yet infants are living in these facilities today. A policy update is promised by March 2027. Why does updating a policy take two years, and what interim measures protect younger children in the meantime?

Matt King: The policy development obviously requires research and consultation, but a key component of that is engagement with Yukon First Nations both internally within the department as well as with other external organizations and stakeholders. There is a significant amount of work that needs to be completed with respect to this policy development. The department has now hired a project lead who is focusing our efforts to complete this work and to scope out the parameters of this engagement along with a full suite of actions related to the recommendations and findings to allow us to then prioritize our resources accordingly.

As with all of the recommendations, I can say that we will strive to complete the work ahead of schedule wherever that is possible. The department is in the process of contacting Yukon First Nations to scope the full project plan and partnership. We intend to develop a project oversight committee that will provide advice and guidance to the team as we receive regular updates and reports on progress. This will allow for adequate time to engage properly with Yukon First Nations in the updating of our policies and procedures.

Interim measures in place to protect young people in the meantime include a budget increase to hire the additional staff mentioned earlier, the addition of the settle shifts and additional staff assigned to group homes based on children's individual needs, and assessments to gauge safety and appropriateness of the homes for healthy living for the children, including the hiring of two child development support workers to support group home efforts to care for young children and children with disabilities.

Tyler Porter: The ratio analysis for group homes is promised by June 2026. If that analysis concludes that the current 1:4 ratio is inadequate for young children, what is the plan and the budget to change it?

Matt King: We have a high rate of vacancies, so we're not certain if it's a lack of funding or how we are using the resources that we have. That will come out through the analysis that we do. Of course, group care is a last resort and our preference is to support kids and youth to remain in communities with extended family members, foster caregivers, or to be reunited with their parents. We will continue with efforts to engage with Yukon First Nations to find community-based solutions for children in group homes, additional training and support for caregivers, caregiver recruitment efforts, on top of social workers searching for extended family caregivers, and potentially reunifying children in group care with families.

If these efforts are successful, it could ultimately enable a reduction in the number of groups homes required and the potential redeployment of staff to help increase ratios across the system.

Chair: If I may follow up on that — noting the high rate of vacancies within group homes and group home staff, what is the department's plan to engage again with past employees? We hear lots from people that it's important work and it's work that they care about, but they also leave the system. What is the department's plan to engage with folks to find out what additional supports would be required to make those positions successful?

Stephen Doyle: I think that, across Family and Children's Services, understanding what is leading to our recruitment and

retention issues is a key component of all parts of the business that we need to do an analysis on, so we will be working to determine the best path to ensuring we get that information from the folks who work there and from the folks who have worked there in the past so that we can better understand. I do believe that this is an important component of figuring out our recruitment and retention strategies.

Tyler Porter: Jumping to recommendation 2 that references cultural plans for Indigenous children mentioned in paragraphs 45 to 46 — and the department's response found on page 30 — cultural plans have been legally required since 2022, but 90 percent of Indigenous children in care still have none. The department has committed to completing cultural plans for all children in care by March 2027. The department targets March 2027 to have cultural plans for all children in care, which is five years after the legal requirement came into force. What is the plan to achieve this ahead of the March 2027 target?

Stephen Doyle: This is an area that requires partnership and consensus with Yukon First Nation governments and other Indigenous government bodies that have children in Yukon Government care. We work with those parties to ensure that the cultural plans are getting done. Any plans to complete cultural plans for children in care must include them for input. All Yukon First Nations have indicated a need to be directly involved in the creation of cultural plans for their children as opposed to non-Indigenous social workers.

We continue to work closely with the Council of Yukon First Nations, Yukon First Nations, and Indigenous governing bodies to advance this work and coordinate ways to meet the targets.

Tyler Porter: A cultural plan is only meaningful if it's kept current. What process will ensure that plans are regularly updated, and who will be accountable to keep them up to date?

Tanya MacKenzie: Ultimately, the department is responsible for ensuring that cultural plans are regularly updated. According to the legislation and cultural plan policy co-developed with Yukon First Nations and CYFN, the cultural plans must be reviewed and updated every six months at least. At this time, we provide any Yukon First Nation government or any organization tasked with developing cultural plans by a Yukon First Nation government \$2,500 per child per year to develop and update these cultural plans.

We will continue to work with Yukon First Nation governments to create cultural plans while respecting their choice to lead the creation of these cultural plans for their children.

Tyler Porter: I have a final question. Who is responsible for ensuring that the cultural plan policy document sets Yukon Government social workers up for success when they go into communities? As noted, it has been stated that First Nations 101 does not go deep enough into the cultural differences of Yukon First Nations.

Tanya MacKenzie: Based on direction from Yukon First Nation governments, the department's social workers do not develop cultural plans for Yukon First Nation children. Instead, Yukon First Nation governments have chosen to create the cultural plans themselves or also work with CYFN to develop these plans on their behalf. This is a critical area for

strengthening partnerships in the interest of children, youth, and families.

Linda Moen: I would like to continue with the same question. How is the department going to work with rural communities and Yukon First Nations to ensure that children remain in the community whenever possible?

Tanya MacKenzie: The department works closely with Yukon First Nations and families in rural communities to find solutions to keep children in their community. Our legislation and respective policies require us to notify and collaboratively plan with Yukon First Nations to ensure that children remain in their communities.

We have taken steps to further operationalize these legislative provisions and our policies with Yukon First Nations through memorandums of understanding. As stated before, we are planning to meet with Yukon First Nations in the coming weeks to have targeted discussions with their leadership on what is required for specific children in the current group homes to be able to return to their communities as soon as possible. We believe that this will result in concrete actions together.

Linda Moen: Recommendation 3, staffing and financial resources, paragraphs 53 to 57: “We found that the department did not complete a comprehensive assessment of the financial and human resources required to deliver services under the Child and Family Services Act. For example, the department did not complete an assessment of staffing, including workload analysis, to develop strategies to manage capacity.”

“We also found that the department did not assess whether its financial resources were sufficient. Our analysis showed payroll costs rose from 60% to 63% of total spending from April 2022 to March 2025, with overtime and casual staff spending increasing 75% during the audit period. These increases were consistent with staffing vacancies we identified in our analysis.”

No workload analysis was ever done — 62 percent of social worker positions filled, overtime costs up 75 percent, no assessment of whether financial resources are sufficient. Department response promises a first comprehensive assessment by October 2026.

My first question is: How long has management been aware of these shortages, and what prevented a workload analysis from having been completed?

Stephen Doyle: Departmental management has been aware that child protection social work positions in Whitehorse and in communities have been hard to fill for several years. The health human resources strategy in 2023-24 provided additional recruitment marketing for these hard-to-fill positions using social media and a LinkedIn recruiter to help boost the recruitment advertisements. We have more work to do in this regard and, recently, to focus renewed system-level health and human resources planning to increase focus on social workers and child protection workers, support for social worker education, and bursaries.

The department will be exploring options to complete a workload analysis as a continuous improvement exercise.

Chair: If I may just follow up on that — in speaking about the workload analysis, it's fine to say that there are efforts to go

out to recruit, but if there is not a recognition that we're asking social workers to work 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and not taking that into what the workload analysis is, it's going to be hard to backfill those positions. So, what work is happening now to identify, for example, the requirements? Having a social worker arrive at the office at 8:00 in the morning but knowing that they are going to go and do a home visit at 8:00 p.m., how is the department going to look at that analysis ahead of time? How are we going to make sure that what we're asking people to do is human — that they will be able to complete it?

Stephen Doyle: I think that there are probably a number of ways that the department can do that, and there have been some initiatives that have already been done to alleviate some of that pressure on social workers. A child and family services social worker — a child protection social worker — is a delegated position; however, we have been doing some internal analysis to determine what parts of those roles require a delegated social worker and where we can alleviate some of the pressure with other positions.

Over the last year, we have created a social services worker position which is designed to help alleviate some of that strain. We are actively looking at how we manage our on-call piece of work, because that is a significant strain on social workers as well, and there will be other analyses of it. One of the things that we really recognize as well is ensuring that our systems are efficient so that social workers are spending their time focused on the areas of child protection rather than focusing too much on administrative tasks and trying to provide them with the appropriate tools to be able to work efficiently — but there's more to come as well.

Linda Moen: The first staffing assessment is promised by October 2026. This is the first such assessment in the department's history by your own admission. How will you establish your assessment process?

Stephen Doyle: We intend to work internally throughout the department — alongside our human resources, our finance, and other branches within Health and Social Services — as well as within the government, such as the Public Service Commission — to undertake an assessment to inform decisions related to future budget cycles.

Linda Moen: How are staffing and budget decisions being made right now without that analysis?

Stephen Doyle: Family and Children's Services works closely with our human resources supports to determine a recruitment approach, timing, and options to fill positions prior to a program submitting a staffing action request form. Part of that may look like ongoing ads and things like that. Until we have a workload analysis completed, the department will continue to make staffing and budget decisions based on caseload size and number of children, youth, families, and young adults that we are supporting to ensure that we are keeping appropriate levels of supports in place.

Linda Moen: The response commits to analyzing vacancy rates and recruitment trends. Two communities have been without a permanent social worker for over a year. What is the specific plan and the timeline to fill those positions? Will there be targeted recruitment of Yukon First Nation and Indigenous candidates?

What strategy will be implemented to increase retention and diversify hiring methods to enlarge the pool of candidates?

Stephen Doyle: There are currently three job postings on the Yukon Government job board for Family and Children's Services child protection social workers, regional, for Pelly Crossing, Ross River, and Old Crow. These postings are "until filled" competitions, so they're posted for extended periods of time. In that type of scenario, we interview as resumes come in. Additional marketing recruitment is also being utilized to promote and attract eligible candidates.

Yukon Government's Indigenous hiring preference gives preference to qualified candidates who self-identify as Yukon First Nation or other Canadian Indigenous ancestry. Competitions are open to all candidates, but this initiative gives preference to Indigenous applications on all posted competitions.

The department relies on benefits afforded to social workers through the collective agreement to increase retention, such as averaging-hour arrangements and the LOU F Regional Social Workers and Supervisor, Regional Services Allowance, in the collective agreement. At this time, there is no overall strategy to increase retention or diversify hiring methods, but we recognize that this is a significant gap and we intend to work toward a strategy.

As an update, the current vacancy rate for social worker positions as of May 2026 is 60 percent, which is a slight decrease from the audit findings percentage. We have, however, been successful in hiring six additional non-bachelor of social work case manager positions that are able to take on most of the duties required of our social worker positions outside of their delegated duties. These are currently term positions in place while the overall workload analysis continues.

Doris Anderson: I just had a question. You referred to hiring Indigenous potential candidates. Would it be Yukon First Nation and Indigenous? There is definitely a difference. "Yukon First Nation" refers to all Yukon First Nations; when you refer to "Indigenous", it is the rest — everyone else. That needs to be clear.

Stephen Doyle: It is Yukon First Nation first; then it is other Indigenous Canadians.

Chair: If I may follow up on that, has there been any work or any partnerships established with Yukon University with their social work program? Recognizing that a person who grows up in rural Yukon is going to be more adapted, for example, to living in Pelly Crossing than, for example, someone from British Columbia — so has there been any work with Yukon University to fill some of these positions?

Stephen Doyle: We continue to engage with the Yukon University to try to ensure that students from that program are coming into our systems and working across Health and Social Services as social workers. I am a graduate of that program, as is Director MacKenzie, and so we believe strongly in ensuring that those students are being afforded opportunities within our services — absolutely.

Linda Moen: Overtime and casual costs rose 75 percent over three years. Will the staffing assessment include a recommendation on whether current spending is sustainable, and will that recommendation be made public?

Matt King: Yes, the department will evaluate overtime and needs through the staffing assessment, including whether the personnel allotment is adequate or sustainable. Determining how best to share the results of the staffing assessment will be part of the process, but generally speaking, as a budget item, it would likely be debated in the Yukon Legislative Assembly through the budget process.

Linda Moen: My final question is: What is the plan to break this cycle?

Matt King: The department will look at the organizational structure and our front-line resource needs and consider the optimal balance of human resources to meet the program and service requirements. This will include the analysis to determine if there are strategic investments that can be made to help reduce pressures in areas like overtime, for example — as well, emphasis on finding more that we can do to attract community caregivers to help defray the costs associated with the group homes and, even more important, of course, the outcomes for the children and youth in care.

Findings from these assessments will inform our decision-making and allow us to put in place what we need to deliver services in a more proactive way going forward.

Patti McLeod: My questions to start with are going to deal with exhibits 5 and 6 particularly: 95 percent of group home staff had not completed safe transportation or suicide intervention training; 89 percent lacked residential school awareness training; 72 percent of social workers had not completed Yukon First Nations 101; the department relied on staff self-reporting compliance. The response from the department promises a learning management system by November 2026 and a full training compliance report by February 2027.

Until the learning management system is in place in November 2026, how is the department tracking whether staff complete mandatory training given that self-reporting was already found to be inadequate?

Tanya MacKenzie: Until the learning management system is in place, the department will continue to track mandatory training completion manually by collecting training completion certificates and by tracking attendance of staff taking the training.

Chair: Just to follow up, why isn't training mandatory, like onboarding, before someone gets put in a position? Why isn't the training required in order to go into that position?

Tanya MacKenzie: So, the mandatory training — in an ideal world, I think we would be able to offer the mandatory training in advance of the staff member starting the training. What we have done in the interim — as you have heard, it has been a challenge to hire staff and to get them in place in the group homes, and so we are doing our best to encourage the mandatory training — the individual to come in with that training prior to working. But in times when that is not possible, we do mentorship and support those staff on-site until the training can occur. We have created some contracts recently to be able to front-end that training when a staff member is hired prior to them going on the floor. We have created a new position for a former supervisor in TSS homes to be able to do intensive supports and intensive small-group training offered

very quickly when we're doing intentional sort of mass hiring, if you will, until the additional training can be offered.

So, I think that's for some of the questions around the struggles that we've had with onboarding individuals coming into the TSS homes.

Chair: Just a follow-up on that — other departments require, for example, safety training as part of paid learning before they go into that position. Why has the department not looked at, for example, three days to complete these required 10 courses? Why is there not, for example, three days or five days or whatever the requirement is to make sure that those courses are completed prior to working with a vulnerable population?

Tanya MacKenzie: Thank you for the question. Yes, I think that's definitely something that we could look into — so, if individuals are coming without the prior training, to be able to create, as you're illustrating, a number of days where they're receiving the support in terms of funding to receive the training and then move into the positions. We will take that into consideration for sure.

Chair: Just one more before I pass it over. Recognizing the failure rate, which is the 95 percent who haven't completed it, at what point in time does the department make the decision that there will be paid training days to ensure that mandatory training courses are held before they're with vulnerable populations? If the audit now shows the, to be honest, dismal numbers, at what point in time does the department consider that paying people to take the training makes sense?

Tanya MacKenzie: I was just conversing with my colleague. Part of what I had stated previously about a supervisor that we put into that position for the year is, in fact, actually doing exactly what you're saying. So, we have hired her to be able to offer paid training days for those new staff who we've recently hired. That is new in the last couple of months.

Patti McLeod: I just want to go back a bit to the 95 percent of group home staff who have not completed suicide intervention training. These staff are, of course, working with vulnerable children right now, so what is the plan to get that training done immediately without waiting for a new system?

Tanya MacKenzie: We absolutely understand the importance of suicide intervention training for group home staff working with vulnerable youth and are prioritizing securing this training for staff through a contract to be able to offer that, and that is one of the goals of the individual whom we just spoke of. She is creating an opportunity to bring those contractors in to offer that training right away. So, that is something that we have done in the number of months, so we understand the importance of that.

Patti McLeod: The first comprehensive training compliance report is promised for February 2027. Will that report be shared with this Committee, and will it be made public?

Tanya MacKenzie: As we work to develop this comprehensive training compliance report, we will also work to determine how best to share those results.

Patti McLeod: How is the department going to ensure that these training programs are completed ahead of starting as a new employee in a vulnerable sector? I know that the witness

has touched on this briefly, but if she can expand, I would appreciate that.

Tanya MacKenzie: Just to expand on what I had spoken of, to ensure that mandatory training is completed before group home workers start caring for children, the department recently hired the professional development coordinator on April 1, 2026 for a one-year term. Their primary role is to coordinate and facilitate all in-person and online training for TSS staff or to bring in those individuals who are experts in those areas. The in-person training that they are coordinating are Food Safe, Risking Connections three-day basic training, Crisis Prevention Institute's Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Training, Online training that they are coordinating includes: Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems 2015 training, or WHMIS; TSS health and safety management systems training; Your Health and Safety Rights at Work training; ATIPP act, level 1, level 2 access, and level 2 privacy training; HIDWA and HIPMA training; Respectful Workplaces; and the Yukon Government's Violence and Harassment Policy training; Medication Administration Refresher training; Understanding Finance training; safe transportation of all clients in cold weather training; Understanding the Values and Ethics Code; and the STITCH model, which is our instant reporting system for workplace injuries.

As of May 2026, all new hires must complete this training during their orientation period before their first shift in the group home. Again, that is paid training that is offered.

Many of the workers had trouble securing spots in the Yukon First Nations 101 training organized by the Public Service Commissioner for the Government of Yukon employees because, as you know, it is in very high demand. So, the department has secured additional spaces in Yukon First Nations 101 courses directly with the branch and Yukon University. These spots are specifically reserved for Family and Children's Services staff and so we are able to get that training offered more regularly.

Patti McLeod: I would like to move on now to recommendation 5, which has to do with compliance reporting and data use.

I am quoting from the report: "The Child and Family Services Act requires that reports on the Department of Health and Social Services' compliance with the act's standards for child and family services be submitted to the Minister every 3 years. This is intended to result in improved services to vulnerable children and families..."

Further on, it says: "In 2021, the department implemented the Family Case Management system to collect child and family services case file information and report on programs and services. The implementation of a case management system was in response to a portion of a recommendation from our 2014 audit report. The new system was intended to increase departmental data capacity, monitor outcomes of children and their families, provide data to Indigenous partners, and improve compliance with child welfare standards and reporting ... We found that a report on the Department of Health and Social Services' compliance with the Child and Family Services Act was last provided to the Minister in 2016, despite a requirement to submit this report every 3 years."

I know that we touched on this briefly earlier today, but no compliance report to the minister since 2016, internal checks

completed but never escalated, case management systems implemented in 2021 but used only for basic reporting — no outcome analysis and no compliance tracking. The department response commits to submitting a partial compliance report for 2022-23 by March 31, 2026 and a full three-year review to the minister in March 2029. The next full three-year compliance review won't reach the minister until March 2029. Given that the last one was in 2016, the minister will have gone 13 years without a complete compliance report. Is there any plan to accelerate this?

Stephen Doyle: On April 30, 2026, the minister received an internal compliance report summarizing findings from the compliance standards for fiscal year 2022-23, as was mentioned. Since the Auditor General's audit covered November 30, 2022 to March 31, 2025, the department has decided not to conduct compliance reviews for that period, utilizing the OAG report as such.

The department is hiring a contractor to complete annual reports for fiscal years 2025-26, 2026-27, and 2027-28 to ensure that they are provided in a timely manner to the minister.

Chair: Just to follow up, the audit will be viewed as the compliance report to the minister for the years that were missed — 2022 to 2025? The audit report will be viewed as sufficient for that gap?

Stephen Doyle: It will be viewed as a report that will help us move forward. We want to make sure that we are ensuring that we get ourselves on track for the next set of reports and ensure that we are making sure that current standards are being reported on. Whereas the OAG report has identified significant gaps, as we have discussed in our current compliance, we would like to put our energies toward ensuring that we can improve for the next set of reports.

Patti McLeod: The case management system has been in place since 2021. The audit found that it was used only for basic service delivery reports, so no outcome tracking and no compliance analysis. What specific data capabilities will be activated and by when?

Tanya MacKenzie: Work to improve our data reporting capabilities has been ongoing, so one example of specific data capability activated following the Office of the Auditor General's audit is reporting on whether workers are making the necessary face-to-face contact with children, youth, and young adults. The department will determine additional data outputs from the case management system. We want to use the system to create data reports that speak to departmental-wide gaps noted by the Office of the Auditor General's findings.

The department is taking steps to integrate business intelligence tools within the case management system while also giving access to the case management system data tables to quality assure staff. These measures will help to improve our ability to extract specific data from reports from the case management system. We are also taking steps to ensure that the correct information is entered into the system so it's accurate.

Patti McLeod: Thank you and I thank the department for their answers. I do have a question for the Auditor General.

The department agreed to all recommendations, but deadlines range from 2026 to 2029. The full compliance review won't reach

the minister until March 2029. The policy manual update is promised for November 2027. The question is: Are these timelines consistent with the urgency of the child safety risks that were identified by the Auditor General?

Markirit Armutlu: We do recognize that implementing audit recommendations, particularly those requiring systemic changes, inherently takes time. We are encouraged that some of the more operational actions, such as the initial reviews of foster and extended family caregiver screenings, are expected to be completed in the near term. These are crucial steps. We do look forward to seeing their full and diligent execution; however, these actions alone are not "said and done" solutions. The department must ensure that it is consistently reviewing and monitoring the safety and well-being of children and youth on an ongoing basis.

When it comes to comprehensive policy reviews, the establishment of a robust compliance tracking mechanism, and subsequent staff training, these timelines appear to be a long way out. Ultimately, our key focus — our unwavering focus and our expectation — is on what truly helps to protect and safeguard children.

Doris Anderson: This question is for the Auditor General on recommendations and responses, pages 29 to 32. What specific indicators would you recommend this Committee monitor at the 12-month mark to assess whether real progress has been made?

Marjolaine Guay: To assess whether real, tangible improvements have been made, this Committee could consider specific information from the department. The department would be able to provide you with information about the progress on these matters either in writing or by appearances before this Committee. In our view, there are specific areas that will provide concrete evidence of whether the department is translating its commitments into actions that directly enhance the protection and well-being of children.

We have a few examples to share, and I will pass it over to my colleague, if you will allow, to give you those examples.

Markirit Armutlu: Some of these examples are: Reports on suspected harm were assessed and screened within the 24 hours of receiving the report, as required. A few others would be, for example: the required minimum contacts were met, and these are for children in care, young adults receiving support services, and children residing with families where child protection cases remain open; plans of care were completed and updated for all children in care of the department; cultural plans completed and updated for all Indigenous children in care of the department; criminal record checks and child welfare system background checks for all adults residing in foster and extended family homes are completed; annual reviews of all foster and extended family homes are completed; and now, from a staffing perspective, recruitment, retention, vacancy rates of social workers working in child protection; and the completion of mandatory training — so, these are really some of the key indicators that we suggest.

Doris Anderson: This question is for the department with reference to intergenerational data. The preamble to the *Child and Family Services Act* states: "The Government of Yukon acknowledges the legacy of the Indian residential school

system and the ongoing systemic barriers and racism, and the ongoing intergenerational trauma and harm to Indigenous peoples and individuals that must be considered when looking at child welfare policies and practices...”

The case management system has been in place since 2021. The audit found that it is used only for basic service delivery — no outcome tracking, no family history analysis.

Does the department collect any data on whether parents of children currently in care were themselves previously in government care, attended residential schools, or have a documented history of abuse? If not, why not, given that this is precisely the intergenerational dynamic that the act itself names as a foundational concern?

Matt King: This data is collected; however, it’s not collected in a way that can be easily used by social workers out of the case management system in a larger data set. This information is collected from more personal trauma-informed conversations with individual family members and is contained within case notes, family trees, visual family mapping tools, and assessment narratives that are created when examining intergenerational impacts for children and youth whose caregivers attended residential school or experienced trauma as children. Paper-based files that predate the current electronic case management system also may contain some of this information, but it’s not fully integrated into the system as yet, so we recognize that this is a gap.

Doris Anderson: The act requires the department to measure outcomes for children and families. Would the department commit to adding intergenerational indicators — parental history in care, residential school family history — to the data it collects through its case management system as part of implementing the final recommendation?

Matt King: The data is being collected. The department and Family and Children’s Services will explore the possibility of adding those indicators that you have mentioned into the data that’s collected through the case management system to ensure that it reflects the full picture of the children in care.

Doris Anderson: The written submission from KDFN: “While KDFN maintains a respectful working relationship with Family and Children’s Services (FCS), formalized through a Memorandum of Agreement, it is deeply concerning that no direct engagement or outreach was made to KDFN leadership following the release of this report. Given the significant and disproportionate impact on KDFN children and families, this lack of communication is unacceptable and inconsistent with the intent of that agreement.”

Why did the department not reach out to KDFN based on the memorandum of agreement? Will the department take steps to adhere to the memorandum of agreement?

Matt King: On behalf of the department, we regret not having reached out to Kwanlin Dün First Nation and acknowledged that this should have been done. We are invested in working in partnership with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Yukon First Nation governments to complete the recommendations as well as perform a full review of the services. The ADM mentioned earlier the work that is happening as far as creating an oversight body, and we think that there is a role there

potentially for the Kwanlin Dün First Nation as well as through the Council of Yukon First Nations and other First Nations that have an interest in helping to guide this work.

Doris Anderson: Family and Children’s Services staff who are not current in mandatory safety or Yukon First Nation cultural training should not be working directly with our children until training is complete. How do you respond to this point by KDFN?

Tanya MacKenzie: We understand the Kwanlin Dün First Nation’s position and the rationale behind it. We will do our best to ensure that Family and Children’s Services staff working directly with Indigenous children, youth, young adults, and families have completed the necessary safety and cultural training. We have hired a professional development coordinator to guarantee that all group home staff have the mandatory safety training before orientation is complete and they attend their first shift. We have also created additional opportunities for staff to complete Yukon First Nations 101 training through Yukon University when the Yukon Government training is full.

We look forward to connecting with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation to explore their concerns and find solutions together that increase their trust in our staff’s ability to care for their children in a culturally appropriate and safe manner.

Chair: The Kwanlin Dün First Nation responded to a request for a written submission, and it’s dated April 15, and it’s up on the website of the Public Accounts Committee today. When is it the intention of the department or officials to meet with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation based on the concerns around the memorandum of agreement?

Stephen Doyle: I believe that we intend to meet with them as soon as practical. We are in the process of coordinating a day-long event with Yukon First Nations — as many as can attend — prior to summer — you know, prior to everybody sort of scattering to the wind in the summer months, which we are hopeful that Kwanlin Dün will attend, and I do believe that they have accepted. And we will be reaching out to offer one-on-one meetings as well with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

Doris Anderson: “Compliance reports required under the *Child and Family Services Act* should be shared with Yukon First Nation leadership or made publicly available to ensure accountability.” How does the department respond to this?

Matt King: We are absolutely open to sharing the findings through our compliance reporting in order to improve accountability and transparency.

Doris Anderson: “The review and update of the *Child and Family Services Act* Manual is not expected until November 2027. KDFN expects to be meaningfully engaged in this process, including opportunities to provide input, co-develop improvements, and participating in cross-training initiatives with FCS staff.” How will the department respond to this expectation?

Stephen Doyle: As mentioned before, the department is in the process of coordinating with Yukon First Nations, including KDFN, to scope the overall project plan for not only the Auditor General recommendations but for a future reform of our services. Alongside the 2027 act review, we intend to work with all Yukon First Nations to be able to get through that process.

Chair: First of all, I will apologize to the witnesses from the Department of Health and Social Services. We sent you the quotes but not the entire letters. That was an oversight on our part. Apologies — they are available and we can make them more available. I note this as I get into the next question.

The submission from the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate was extensive, so this is about points between pages 9 and 11. The YCAO flags that the OAG audit only examined cases that FCS had already screened in. Since the 2022 amendments to the *Child and Family Services Act*, FCS has significantly narrowed its mandate and is screening out a growing number of cases involving children with clear risk indicators, such as chronic absenteeism, youth homelessness, abuse by a non-parent, children with disabilities, and high-conflict parenting situations. In these cases, there is often no risk assessment, no referral, and no follow-up. How does the department respond to this assertion?

Stephen Doyle: As mentioned before, we intend to work very closely and collaboratively with Yukon First Nations to review and improve our services in partnership with the project oversight committee, which includes Yukon Government, Yukon First Nation health directors, Council of Yukon First Nations, and the federal government. The intent behind that is to identify areas of priority to work on, including the OAG audit recommendations plus any other areas that this group determines to be priorities. We have very much heard this concern from Yukon First Nations as well, and I highly suspect that this will be one of the early areas of priority.

We do intend to work closely with the Child and Youth Advocate Office during the review process and on an ongoing basis, recognizing the importance of the efficacy in this work and recognizing that this is a system-wide issue that does need a lot of attention.

Chair: Based on extensive engagement, the YCAO states that FCS increasingly tells families that FCS does not provide prevention services, FCS does not investigate child abuse when the alleged perpetrator is not a parent, and services for children with disabilities have been repealed. Is this an accurate description of current FCS practice, and if so, who made these policy decisions and when?

Stephen Doyle: So, Family and Children's Services does provide some prevention services. These include providing prenatal services to at-risk expectant parents to reduce child protection concerns that may arise when a child is born. Other prevention services are geared toward preventing children in need of protective intervention from being separated from their families. The *Child and Family Services Act* gives the director the ability to provide supports to parents to address the child protection concerns while the children to continue to live with the parents.

By working with the parents to create safety, we prevent separating children from their families. Family and Children's Services also provides universal prevention services to families that do not have child protection concerns through the family resources unit. That being said, we acknowledge that there are challenges and gaps in the system and that improvement needs to be made and that we cannot make meaningful and impactful change on our own. We are looking forward to working collaboratively with Yukon First Nation governments, the

Council of Yukon First Nations, and the Child and Youth Advocate Office to better meet the needs of Yukon children and youth and families in this area.

Chair: Just to follow up on that question, I think the challenge is that this was how families and children felt that they were being responded to by Family and Children's Services. They are made in broad statements, but the reality is that these are many families and many individuals over time who have felt that they have been turned away. So, what plan or how will you engage with the Child and Youth Advocate Office to start to change that conversation? It is fine to list what happens now, but if a person feels that they have approached for support and it doesn't exist, how will the department respond to that gap?

Stephen Doyle: We intend to work closely with the Child and Youth Advocate Office to try to find interim solutions — you know, on a case-by-case basis as best as we can — and the work that we want to do with Yukon First Nations, and creating this as a high priority really does speak to the idea of addressing the system gap. While I did acknowledge that there are services offered by Family and Children's Services, I think it is fair to say that there are also system gaps that in a number of ways could potentially be mitigated. So, we look forward to working with all parties very much, including the Child and Youth Advocate Office, in ways that we can mitigate some of these system gaps that do exist.

Chair: This next question is for the Auditor General. The audit examined 55 screened-out cases but only to count them, not to assess whether screening decisions were appropriate. The YCAO recommends a comprehensive audit of all screened-out cases. Why did the OAG decide not to audit the screened-out cases?

Sean MacLennan: To clarify, we did examine the 55 screened-out cases, so we did select a representative sample of 48 child protection files. In those 48 files, there were 134 reports of suspected harm. That included the 55 screened-out cases. We did look to examine whether the department responded to those reports of harm within the required 24 hours. We found that the department did, in all 134 cases, use a structured and risk-based approach to assessing those reports of harm, but we did not question the risk ratings assigned by social workers and then reviewed and approved by supervisors to inform the screening decisions. However, we did report that 37 percent of the cases in our sample were not assessed and screened within the 24 hours as required.

Chair: Building on that question — so, this is a question for the department: Will the department commit to reviewing those cases, and if not, why not?

Stephen Doyle: As mentioned before, we acknowledge that improvements are needed and commit to taking action to change the way that we work. The department will be reviewing all aspects of our service provision alongside of our partners, including the Child and Youth Advocate Office, and we'll consider this as part of the broader comprehensive review that we are doing. We will be seeking input from the Child and Youth Advocate Office on an ongoing basis, and we'll be working together to try to address these gaps.

Chair: In the YCAO submission, pages 13 and 14, the YCAO currently receives information about children in care through a single FCS policy liaison rather than through direct access to case files or front-line staff. Some Canadian jurisdictions give their advocate direct access to case management systems. The question: Is the single policy liaison model the department's intended long-term approach to working with the YCAO, and is there openness to reviewing it?

Stephen Doyle: Yes, the department is open to reviewing our long-term approach to working and our partnership with the Child and Youth Advocate. My position is Assistant Deputy Minister, Social Services. I am now meeting with the Child and Youth Advocate Office on a monthly basis to ensure that there is a direct line of communication at my level. We will be working directly with the Child and Youth Advocate Office to determine what the best approach is for us to be working closely together to ensure that the Child and Youth Advocate Office is getting information in a timely way and in a way that works well for them.

Chair: The Committee also received a written response from the Yukon Status of Women Council. In their submission on pages between 1 and 3, the YSWC pointed out that virtually every problem identified in the 2026 audit was also identified in the 2014 audit and that the department made commitments in 2014 that it demonstrably failed to keep. So, who was accountable for the 2014 commitments, and what accountability mechanism exists to ensure that the 2026 commitments do not follow the same path?

Markirit Armutlu: The requirements of the *Child and Family Services Act* to report on compliance with the act standards every three years is intended to be a mechanism to support improved services to vulnerable children and families who are involved with the child welfare system. This is because the compliance report permits the minister to identify challenges and areas in need of additional support. Accountability in the department would be at the deputy minister level.

Chair: Is there a response from the department at all?

Matt King: Following the 2014 audit, regular updates were made to senior leadership, including quarterly reports from the director and the assistant deputy minister. The last update to senior leadership on these commitments was made in August of 2023. So, we will go back and revisit and ensure that the actions required under the 2014 audit are also continually scoped in and followed up through this process.

Chair: In the YSWC submission, pages 4 and 5, in March 2026, the YSWC interviewed 35 parents with lived experience of FCS involvement. These are quotes: "Participants expressed feeling that the process of offering little to no supports or resources preventatively, then imposing supports or resources upon them after the children being removed is backwards and leaves parents feeling judged and unsupported by the department."

"Participants identifies that accessing formal supports and resources were barriers that prevented either having their children removed, or reunification with their children for extended periods of time."

"Participants expressed feeling like they were put into impossible situations."

"100% of the participants spoke about being confused about the process."

"The majority of the participants stated that, if there was a case plan that was completed, it was never updated. This left them in a state of perpetual unknowing and confusion. Many stated they felt like every time they completed what they often referenced as one of the 'requirements' the department put in place ... the department would then add on more expectations to be met without providing any clear timelines for the family to be reunified."

So, 100 percent of parents interviewed by YSWC in March 2026 said that they were confused about what they needed to do to get their children back. The audit found that 47 percent of the plans of care were missing or out of date. These two findings together suggest that families are being expected to work toward reunification without a clear, current written plan. How is reunification being facilitated ahead of care plans?

Tanya MacKenzie: Case plans and plans of care are not required to start working toward family reunification, and this is always our goal. In the absence of these plans and when families are ready to start the journey toward reunification, we meet with them as well as any other involved supports to discuss the child protection concerns and figure out ways that they could be addressed to create safety for their children. In circumstances where safety concerns remain, we also will strive to communicate these concerns with parents and their support people and advocates and plan together around how to mitigate these concerns to ensure that family reunification is always the goal. The department does not stop the family reunification process because there is no written plan; however, we do acknowledge the importance of a written plan and creating any way to create clarity for these families.

Chair: I'll note that these were interviews that were done in March 2026 — so, months ago — where families have said that they feel like there are barriers being put in place for unification regardless of what has just been said about care plans. So, understanding that two months ago, families said that the department — or Family and Children's Services were putting in barriers to reunification, how does that change — how does the department change this? These aren't historic; these are 35 families interviewed in March 2026 saying that they feel that the department is hindering their ability to reunify with their children. Not that I expect an answer here, but I will note that this is not a past practice; this is a current and ongoing practice that has been identified by 35 individuals who are accessing Family and Children's Services.

Tanya MacKenzie: I watch those concerns — absolutely — and I think that we are trying to increase clarity and transparency of why we are involved with families as soon as we can. I think that part of the work that we're doing is to increase the capacity of our workers and have workers available to immediately meet with families as soon as we have a concern reported to us and become involved. We're also — in having additional workers hired, our ability to reach out to any supports that families indicate, is that someone who they would like to be a part of our involvement with them right at the onset, so — absolutely — transparency, clarity, ongoing engagement, working with families right from the onset is our goal. And I think that is something that we are really trying to increase those collaborative efforts right

from the onset of our involvement. In doing that, human capacity has been a big concern for us, and that is something in our work to create those additional resources, like case management positions, to allow for that face-to-face, immediate contact with families to identify the concerns right from the onset, to create that clarity and transparency, to build a case plan together to have children return home is our goal. So, I do acknowledge and hear those concerns, and we really are trying to increase the supports and the clarity for families to know that.

On top of some of the things that the ADM and the DM have indicated, I think that our work with Yukon First Nations and looking at how we bring community, extended-family caregivers together right from the onset — I think that the goal, like you said, is to create the opportunity for kids to be able to go back into their community right from the beginning and perhaps maybe never come into our care and have reunification work between community, family, and parents right from the beginning. This is another goal that we're working toward, I think. So, I do hear the families' concerns. I do acknowledge your concerns as well and it's something that we are really working toward providing that transparency, clarity, but I do acknowledge those concerns.

Chair: One thing to follow up on a question from a previous colleague, when we talk about the data collection for history, there's a power imbalance between the government office and the family. To be frank, it sounds a lot like revisiting atrocities from the past when a child is removed. There's a power imbalance between representatives of the Yukon Government and a family that is working toward reunification or has had the intervention.

When we talk about a system being put in place that is trauma-informed that recognizes — this also goes back to questions around making sure that social workers going into communities understand the communities that they're going into. Without that understanding, more harm can be done even if they're not part of the cultural plan. Reading this, on top of that, we can all understand that this entire performance audit has been very hard to read. I recognize the work done by the Office of the Auditor General and, of course, the folks within Family and Children's Services. That final one really brought that home.

In that same breath, these parents reported that more resources were offered after children were removed than were available before removal. The YCAO separately notes that FCS has significantly reduced prevention and early intervention services since 2022. Is prevention within the current FCS mandate? Has funding for prevention moved to First Nation governments and organizations? What coordination exists to ensure families who are not connected to a First Nation have access to prevention supports and early intervention services?

Stephen Doyle: As discussed earlier, the department does still provide prevention services, but also, as discussed earlier, this is an area of significant concern that we have heard from many parties, including within this audit. We do intend to identify what the gaps and barriers are within that and collectively try to find ways to improve this part of the system.

The Government of Canada does fund Yukon First Nation governments and other organizations to deliver prevention programming. However, they, like us, are not alone in this. This needs to be a system-wide look at how we are dealing with the prevention side of things and, when calls are coming our way and they are screened out, those families still likely need supports and likely need things offered to them. While there are pieces in place, I do believe that, when we work with Yukon First Nations to collectively identify priorities — based on the conversations that we have already had — it will be an area of significant focus on how the system better responds to those types of cases, ensuring that prevention — because, in a perfect world, children are never coming into care. I think that we can collectively work to reduce the number of children who are coming into care — or families that do need support prior to that are receiving it.

Chair: We have reached the end of our questions. I will ask my colleagues: Are there any other questions for the witnesses?

Would the witnesses like to make closing remarks?

Before I adjourn this hearing, I would like to make a few remarks on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. First of all, I would like to thank the witnesses from the Department of Health and Social Services and the Office of the Auditor General of Canada.

Transcripts of this hearing and documents provided by the departments will be available to the public to consult on our webpage, yukonassembly.ca/committees/pac. Today's hearing does not signify the end of the Committee's consideration of child and family services in the Yukon. The Committee will follow up with the departments on implementation of the commitments made in response to the recommendations of the Auditor General and to the Committee itself. The Committee has come a long way since 2014 and we will be following up.

With that, I would again thank all those who participated in and helped to organize today's hearing.

I now declare this hearing adjourned.

The Committee adjourned at 3:19 p.m.