

Chapter 5

Justice and Attorney General—Providing Transition Spaces for Individuals Leaving Interpersonal Violence

1.0 MAIN POINTS

Saskatchewan has one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence in Canada. In 2023, Saskatchewan experienced 710 police-reported intimate partner violence incidents per 100,000.¹

Leaving situations of interpersonal violence, whether inflicted by an intimate partner or a family member takes courage; survivors need immediate access to safe spaces and appropriate supports.

The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General helps fund transition spaces for individuals leaving interpersonal violence through transition houses and second-stage housing. The Ministry provided 12 transition houses \$7.4 million and seven second-stage houses \$328,000 in 2023–24.

We focused our audit on the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's processes to provide transition spaces for individuals leaving interpersonal violence through transition houses and second-stage housing. We found the Ministry had effective processes, except it needs to:

- Periodically inspect transition houses to assess whether they meet established requirements including necessary security measures, appropriate sleeping accommodations, and properly trained staff. While the Ministry expects transition house staff receive certain training throughout the year (i.e., trauma-informed care) as outlined in funding agreements, we found only one of 12 transition houses reported completing trauma-informed training.
- Verify periodic criminal record checks exist for staff working in transition and second-stage houses. We found one instance where an employee at a transition house did not have a criminal record check on file.
- Determine, analyze, and report key performance information (e.g., number of individuals turned away each month, number of survivors helped) from transition houses to senior management to help inform strategies that address performance shortfalls. Our analysis of turn-away rates at the Ministry-funded transition houses found 18% of turn-aways that occurred between April 2023 and March 2024 resulted from capacity issues.

¹ www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/241024/dq241024b-eng.htm (2 March 2025).



- Rationalize its funding provided to each transition and second-stage house. The Ministry could not explain why funding levels differed between transition houses across the province. For example, transition houses in Regina (WISH) and Swift Current have the same number of beds at 14, but funding levels differed by over \$200,000 for 2023–24. Funding levels were also not based on the extent of survivors served.
- Make information about its licensing and funding process more accessible for potential new transition house operators. We found one instance of a transition house in operation since October 2023 without an approved licence from the Ministry because it does not receive any Ministry funding.

Effectively supporting individuals leaving interpersonal violence through transition spaces, helps ensure survivors can live in a safe household, retain or access employment, and have consistent access to childcare and/or education for children.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal violence is the intentional and unlawful use of physical force or power, threatened or actual that either results in, or has a high likelihood of, injury, death, psychological harm, or deprivation. It relates to family, partner, and community violence (e.g., shootings in public places, such as at schools and on streets).²

The Ministry provides financial assistance to three program areas that support the provision of spaces for individuals leaving interpersonal violence:

- **Transition Houses:** provide short-term emergency safe shelter for up to 90 days and offer support services available 24/7 for individuals (typically 18 years of age and older) with or without children leaving circumstances of violence and abuse
- **Second-Stage Housing:** provides shelter for a period of up to two years as well as intervention and counselling support services focused on independent living skills for individuals with or without children leaving circumstances of violence and abuse (often utilized after transition houses)
- **Enhanced Residential Homes:** provide short-term emergency safe shelter for a short-term period and support services for individuals and their children with issues beyond family violence including addictions, mental health concerns, and/or homelessness

Our audit focused on transition houses and second-stage housing. The Ministry provided transition houses \$7.4 million and second-stage houses \$328,000 in 2023–24.

² www.who.int/groups/violence-prevention-alliance/approach (5 November 2024).

2.1 Interpersonal Violence in Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan has one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence in Canada.³

As illustrated in **Figure 1**, Statistics Canada found for every 100,000 people, Saskatchewan had one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence from 2020–23, with only the territories experiencing higher rates.⁴ Saskatchewan experienced 710 police-reported intimate partner violence incidents per 100,000 people in 2023.

Figure 1—Provincial Intimate Partner Violence Rates (police-reported) per 100,000 Population for 2020–23

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Canada	338	347	349	354
Nunavut	5,427	5,318	5,406	5,670
Northwest Territories	3,885	4,187	4,213	4,002
Yukon	1,311	1,479	1,351	1,306
Saskatchewan	765	742	748	710
Manitoba	594	613	631	628
New Brunswick	497	496	445	449
Newfoundland and Labrador	419	425	421	420
Quebec	322	357	369	386
Alberta	397	392	394	385
Nova Scotia	368	349	348	338
British Columbia	324	318	294	288
Prince Edward Island	284	255	258	288
Ontario	242	249	257	269

Source: Statistics Canada, *Trends in police-reported intimate partner violence in Canada, 2023*. The rate of family violence in each province is very similar to that of intimate partner violence. www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/241024/dq241024b-eng.htm (2 March 2025).

Women are considerably more likely to have experienced severe forms of interpersonal violence in their lifetime compared to men, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.⁵ Additionally, Indigenous women in Canada are more likely to have experienced interpersonal violence when compared to non-Indigenous women.⁶

2.2 Ministry Role in Providing Safe Spaces

The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General provides financial assistance set out in *The Community Justice Program Regulations* to community justice programs including education, programming, and services with respect to family and interpersonal violence.⁷

³ thestarphenix.com/news/saskatchewan/sask-still-worse-in-canada-for-intimate-partner-family-violence (5 November 2024).

⁴ globalnews.ca/news/3256732/saskatchewan-has-highest-family-violence-rate-among-provinces/ (5 November 2024).

⁵ Government of Canada, *Fact sheet: Intimate partner violence*. canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intimate-partner-violence.html#toc2 (17 October 2024).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *The Community Justice Program Regulations*, s. 2(2)(e).



The Residential Services Act, 2019, gives the Ministry the ability to license and inspect transition houses that it funds.⁸

The Ministry's Community Safety and Well-Being Branch provides funding for community-based organizations that operate interpersonal violence and abuse programs and transition spaces (e.g., women's shelters). It also licenses and inspects transition houses that it funds.

In March 2023, the Ministry announced it would allocate \$876,000 over three years to second-stage housing.⁹ Funding for and approval of second-stage houses occurred through the Ministry's budgetary process. The Ministry expects second-stage houses it has agreements with to provide survivors with counselling, life skills, intervention services, and supports so survivors can learn to live independently.

In 2024–25, the Ministry expected to give \$330,000 to seven second-stage housing shelters. The Ministry also planned to spend \$7.6 million on supporting 12 transition houses in 2024–25.¹⁰

In March 2024, the Ministry internally reported its funding of transition houses helped approximately 1,000 women and 1,200 children leave violence by providing access to secure, safe, confidential accommodations while in crisis.¹¹

2.3 Importance of Providing Safe and Supportive Spaces for Individuals Leaving Interpersonal Violence

Leaving interpersonal violence takes courage; individuals need access to safe spaces and appropriate support services when escaping violence. It is therefore crucial that housing options and support services be available, and in proximity, so that survivors have somewhere safe to go.¹²

Individuals affected by violence can face several barriers preventing them from accessing shelters and transition housing services, including difficulties leaving abusive relationships, inability to access housing or support services provided by shelters or transition houses, or low income.¹³

Research shows that transition spaces are important in mitigating interpersonal violence. Transition houses can help individuals navigate various social services and administrative processes, such as securing financial support and more permanent housing, navigating child custody and childcare, accessing legal services, referrals, counselling, and advocacy, as well as help with providing police statements.¹⁴

⁸ *The Residential Services Act, 2019*, sections 3 and 10 and *The Residential Services Regulations*, section 2-9.

⁹ Saskatoon Star Phoenix, *Saskatchewan spending to build up second-stage shelter capacity*. thestarphoenix.com/news/local-news/saskatchewan-spending-to-build-up-second-stage-shelter-capacity (5 November 2024).

¹⁰ Adapted from Ministry of Justice and Attorney General records.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Vecchio, Karen et al. (2019). *Surviving Abuse and Building Resilience—A Study of Canada's Systems of Shelters and Transition Houses Serving Women and Children Affected by Violence*. Ottawa: Author, p. 9.

¹³ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁴ Grafton, Emily et al. (2023). *Addressing GBV in Saskatchewan through Second Stage Housing: Mitigating Public Policy Deficits to Enhance Safety for Survivors*. Regina: Author, p. 23.

Interpersonal violence generates high costs to human-service systems, workplaces, individuals, and families and has serious health, social, and financial impacts on those directly involved. These impacts can last a lifetime and span generations, leading to intergenerational trauma. Consequences of interpersonal violence include physical injuries (e.g., brain damage, paralysis); psychological injury with the potential to lead to abnormal development or deprivation; infections (e.g., sexually transmitted infections); substance abuse; unintended pregnancy; and significant mental health issues (e.g., depression, suicide).¹⁵

Research conducted in Regina and Saskatoon estimated the financial cost of one domestic violence incident at \$112,000 to the justice, social services, and health systems and to the survivor. In 2018, interpersonal violence was estimated to cost Saskatchewan over \$450 million annually.¹⁶

Effectively supporting individuals leaving interpersonal violence through transition housing to independent living helps ensure survivors retain or access employment, have consistent access to childcare and/or education for children, have access to healthcare or substance use services, and can live in a household free from abuse in a safe community.¹⁷

3.0 AUDIT CONCLUSION

We concluded, for the 16-month period ending July 31, 2024, the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General had, except for the following areas, effective processes to provide transition spaces for individuals leaving interpersonal violence.

The Ministry needs to:

- **Make information about its licensing and funding process more accessible for potential new transition house operators**
- **Rationalize its funding provided to each transition and second-stage house**
- **Periodically inspect transition houses**
- **Verify periodic criminal record checks for staff working in transition and second-stage houses**
- **Determine key performance information needed from transition houses**
- **Analyze and report key information obtained from transition and second-stage houses to determine strategies to address performance shortfalls**

¹⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022). *Fast Facts: Preventing Intimate Partner Violence*, p. 2. www.cdc.gov/intimate-partner-violence/about/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html (10 March 2025).

¹⁶ Saskatchewan Domestic Violence Death Review Report, p. 2. www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2018/may/24/domestic-violence-death-review-report (29 January 2025).

¹⁷ Grafton, Emily et al. (2023). *Addressing GBV in Saskatchewan through Second Stage Housing: Mitigating Public Policy Deficits to Enhance Safety for Survivors*. Regina: Author, p. 5.

**Figure 2—Audit Objective, Criteria, and Approach****Audit Objective:**

To assess the effectiveness of the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's processes, for the 16-month period ending July 31, 2024, to provide transition spaces for individuals leaving interpersonal violence.

Audit Criteria:

Processes to:

1. Plan for timely access to transition spaces for individuals

- Approve rationale of resources needed for transition spaces
- Select appropriate community-based organizations to provide safe, supportive spaces
- Establish and align service expectations with good practice (safe, culturally appropriate, accessible)
- Set measurable outcomes for evaluating service delivery

2. Use community-based organizations to deliver safe and supportive housing

- Support the use of adequately trained staff to deliver services (e.g., trauma informed, cultural, safety)
- Maintain a safe, accessible environment for individuals to live
- Through partnerships, connect individuals with required supports (e.g., counselling, job agencies, childcare)

3. Monitor and evaluate transition space service delivery

- Monitor community-based organizations in providing safe transition spaces
- Analyze key outcomes (e.g., number of turn-aways, lengths of stay, connections to services) and address areas where performance falls short
- Periodically report key results to interested parties (e.g., senior management)

Audit Approach:

To conduct this audit, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's processes, we used the above criteria based on our related work, review of literature including reports of other auditors, and consultations with management. Ministry management agreed with the above criteria.

We examined Ministry policies and procedures relating to licensing and funding transition houses to provide transition spaces for individuals leaving interpersonal violence. We interviewed key staff and analyzed data such as the number of spaces in transition houses, and the number of individuals served and turned away. We tested a sample of licence applications to assess whether the Ministry obtained all required information from transition houses. Additionally, we verified transition houses followed up on referrals made on behalf of survivors to external services (e.g., income assistance, housing, addictions treatment). We also used an external consultant with expertise in the area to help us identify good practice and to assess the Ministry's processes.

4.0 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Majority of Transition Houses Licensed

The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General established processes to license transition houses in Saskatchewan. We found one instance of a transition house operating without a licence because the Ministry did not fund it.

As defined under *The Residential Services Regulations*, the Ministry requires any community-based organization operating a transition house in the province to be licensed. As of July 2024, the Ministry funded and licensed 11 transition houses across the province (see **Figure 4**). Licences require annual renewal.

If a transition house is located on reserve, it is typically the Federal Government's responsibility to license the home. Additionally, the transition house located in the provincial border community of Lloydminster is licensed by the Alberta Government.

The Ministry expects community-based organizations operating transition houses and seeking funding and licensing from the Ministry to complete and submit a Program Standards Report. This Report is completed as part of an initial licence application and the annual licence renewal process. The community-based organizations self-report relevant information (see **Figure 3**) in the Program Standards Report for Ministry review. We found the information requirements in the Program Standards Report consistent with *The Residential Services Regulations* and good practice.

Figure 3—Program Standards Report Information Requirements

Physical standards

- Location (e.g., accessible to public transportation, parks)
- Required designated areas (e.g., areas for dining, sleeping, and food preparation used only for those purposes)
- Sleeping accommodation (e.g., one client per bed, no more than two adults or four children per bedroom)
- Washroom facilities (e.g., at least one wash basin and toilet for every five clients)
- Exits (e.g., all exits equipped with easy-to-use hardware)
- Accessibility (e.g., no person with a physical disability should be placed in a bedroom above or below ground level)
- Fire inspection report
- Health inspection report
- Insurance coverage (property, automobile, general)

Program standards

- Meals prepared in accordance with Canada Food Guide
- Personal records (e.g., complete records of individual programming for each client)
- Medical treatment (e.g., first aid supplies available)
- Security measures (e.g., fencing, intercom system, cameras, curtains/blinds, exterior lighting)
- Disclosure of communicable illnesses/injuries (e.g., bed bugs, lice, measles)
- Description of training transition house staff received

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General *Protocols for Annual License Approval for Enhanced Residential Service Facilities and Transition Houses in Saskatchewan*.

We tested two transition houses licensed by the Ministry and found both houses submitted information that met Ministry requirements, and the Ministry sufficiently reviewed the submitted information.

We reviewed the list of transition house licences and associated expiry dates and found all were current.

In instances where transition houses do not provide all required information, Ministry staff follow up. We found two instances where transition houses could not obtain a health inspection prior to the deadline for licence renewal (due to wait times for public health inspections). In these instances, the Ministry appropriately issued a temporary licence to allow the transition house to continue to operate while waiting for an inspection.

Temporary licences are shorter term in nature and followed up frequently by the Ministry. At July 2024, the two transition houses were still waiting on health inspections. The Ministry issued these temporary licences in April 2024 with December 2024 expiry. As of January 2025, the Ministry indicated it issued a full licence for one of these transition houses and the other had a new temporary licence as it was still waiting on a health inspection.



We found one instance of a transition house operating without an approved licence because it does not receive any Ministry funding. It has been operating since October 2023.

Given the Ministry does not provide funding to this transition house, there is no legislative requirement for this transition house to be licensed. We found the Provincial Association of Transition Houses (PATHS) website lists this transition house as available to accommodate those leaving interpersonal violence.¹⁸

Without a Ministry-approved licence, an operating transition house may not meet regulatory standards for safety and care, including the standards set out by *The Residential Services Act, 2019*. This could result in a transition house not providing safe and supportive spaces for vulnerable people and children leaving interpersonal violence.

The Ministry does not license second-stage houses as these houses operate in a landlord-tenant type of relationship (i.e., the survivor of interpersonal violence pays rent to the second-stage house operator to occupy a unit). Second-stage houses provide counselling focused on building skills that contribute to independent living. We found this consistent with other jurisdictions and good practice.

As of July 2024, the Ministry funded seven second-stage houses in Saskatchewan.

See **Section 5.0** for a list of all transition houses and second-stage houses operating in the province as of December 31, 2024. Transition houses can be found in 13 communities across the province, with six located in the northern part of the province (e.g., Prince Albert, La Ronge, Black Lake) and seven located in the southern part of the province.

4.2 Accessible Funding and Licensing Information Lacking

The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General does not have an accessible method (e.g., no publicly available information on its website or links to apply) for new transition houses to apply for funding, and thus, a licence.

The Ministry last approved and licensed a new transition house in 2018. Since that time, the Ministry funded 12 transition houses and annually licensed 11 transition houses (i.e., the Alberta Government licenses the transition house in Lloydminster and the Ministry funds a portion). **Figure 4** lists the transition houses the Ministry licensed and/or funded as of July 2024.

Figure 4—Transition Houses Licensed and/or Funded by the Ministry as of July 2024

Community	Transition House	Spaces	2024–25 Funding (\$)
La Ronge	Piwapan Women's Centre	19	309,809
Lloydminster ^A	Lloydminster Interval Home	33	203,562
Melfort	Northeast Outreach & Support Services	21	564,847
Prince Albert	Prince Albert Safe Shelter for Women	26	861,319

¹⁸ The Provincial Association of Transition Houses supports and collaborates with member agencies (e.g., agencies with a mandate to provide services around interpersonal violence, such as operating a transition house or second-stage house) and others to address, prevent, and ultimately eliminate intimate partner and family violence. patherssk.org/philosophy/ (28 January 2025).

Community	Transition House	Spaces	2024–25 Funding (\$)
Saskatoon	Saskatoon Interval House	31	1,170,538
Swift Current	South West Crisis Services	14	484,067
North Battleford	Battlefords Interval House	19	694,432
Moose Jaw	Moose Jaw Transition House	16	600,714
Regina	Regina Transition House	27	935,006
	Wichihik Iskwewak Safe House (WISH)	14	697,476
	YWCA Isabel Johnson Shelter	13	572,854
Yorkton	Shelwin House	15	569,877

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Justice and Attorney General records including transfer agreements with each agency.

^A The Alberta Government licenses the Lloydminster Interval Home and the Ministry provides a portion of the Home's funding.

The Ministry does not have an easily accessible way for new transition houses to apply for licensing and funding. Currently, it relies on potential applicants contacting either the Ministry directly or referred to the Ministry based on inquiries made to other government agencies (e.g., Saskatchewan Housing Corporation). Once in contact, the Ministry provides potential applicants with an information package, which includes a templated Program Standards Report outlining requirements as described in **Section 4.1**.

Between April 2023 and July 2024, just one potential transition house applicant emailed the Ministry to make initial inquiries about licensing in October 2023. As of July 2024, the Ministry had not heard back from this applicant. The Ministry informed the potential transition house it had contacted the right area to apply for a licence but did not receive any further communication. This potential applicant is the unregulated transition house mentioned in **Section 4.1**.

Having a clear and accessible way for potential applicants to apply for funding (and licensing) can assist in providing necessary information to potential applicants sooner. It also removes barriers for organizations attempting to find operating funding for a transition house and can help save time in the application process.

1. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General make information on how to apply for funding and licensing more accessible to potential transition house operators.**

4.3 Agreements Clearly Outline Service Expectations but Clarification Needed for Key Performance Information

The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General uses transfer agreements to adequately outline service expectations, reporting requirements, and funding levels with transition and second-stage houses. However, the Ministry needs to determine key performance information it requires from transition houses so it can monitor service performance.



Transition Houses

Every three years, the Ministry updates its agreements with transition houses. The most recent agreements cover the period 2024–27. We found all 12 transition houses had a signed agreement with the Ministry expecting services to be provided until 2027.

The Ministry enhances its transition housing agreements each time a new agreement is signed. For example, in its latest agreements, the Ministry incorporated new clauses related to reporting child abuse, maintaining survivor confidentiality (e.g., do not use confidential information except to provide services), and providing staff training.

The Ministry uses agreements with transition houses to clearly outline service expectations. Transfer agreements are templated to maintain consistency between agreements. Each transition house must:¹⁹

- Annually renew its licence under *The Residential Services Act*
- Adequately maintain the housing facility
- Have a policy requiring new board members, staff, and volunteers to provide a criminal record check
- Not exceed the capacity noted on the Ministry-approved licence
- Develop and maintain relationships with external service providers (e.g., counsellors, Ministry of Social Services)
- Make efforts to connect survivors with another transition house if at capacity
- Maintain operational data and adequately train staff in using their information system database
- Employ and train qualified staff, including ensuring staff are trained in and practice trauma-informed care²⁰

We assessed the adequacy of these agreements and found them consistent with good practice. We also compared the service expectations in these agreements with legislative requirements (i.e., *The Residential Services Act, 2019*, and Regulations) and found expectations aligned.

Additionally, each transition house sets its own performance outputs and outcomes in the appendices of the transfer agreement. **Figure 5** provides examples of the activities, outputs, and outcomes agreed to by the Ministry and transition houses. There was no consistency in performance outputs and outcomes between transition house agreements. This can make it more difficult for the Ministry to consistently compare transition house performance.

¹⁹ Adapted from Ministry of Justice and Attorney General transfer agreements.

²⁰ Trauma-informed care is a framework where the provider responds appropriately to trauma's impact by emphasizing physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both the provider and survivor in rebuilding a sense of control and empowerment. <https://www.jim.ca/news/trauma-informed-care-builds-resilience-survivors-human-trafficking-violence#:~:text=Trauma%2Dinformed%20care%20is%20a%20hallmark%20of%20effective%20survivor%20engagement.path%20to%20healing%20and%20restoration> (6 November 2024).

Figure 5—Examples of Performance Outputs and Outcomes in Transition House Agreements

Activities / Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes
24-hour emergency safe shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of people and families housed in shelter Number of Emergency Intervention Orders (EIO)^A secured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing safety for families experiencing interpersonal violence Increased access to basic needs (food, shelter) Increased stabilization (urgent physical and mental health needs) Increased knowledge of resources and rights
Non-clinical supports including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 24-hour Crisis Line Accompaniment, transportation and facilitating access, referrals, and transition to appropriate follow-up care or services Crisis intervention—immediate, short-term help Advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of calls to 24-hour crisis line # of trained volunteers responding to crisis line # of calls to attend (support at) the hospital # of individualized case plans # of survivors assisted to access law enforcement # of survivors assisted with court processes # of survivors assisted with medical appointments # of referrals/connections to external agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing immediate risk of harm Increased understanding of legal rights, medical procedures, and support resources Improved strategies to cope with distress and trauma symptoms Increased access to necessary medical examinations, legal consultations, or police interviews Enhanced sense of safety and support

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General transfer agreements with transition houses.

^A An EIO is a court order containing conditions that may provide for the survivor's immediate protection including ordering the suspected abuser not to talk to or contact the survivor or family through any form of communication; immediate right of survivor to stay in their home without the suspected abuser being there; direct a police officer to remove the suspected abuser from the home. EIOs are a component of Saskatchewan's *Victims of Interpersonal Violence Act*.

While **Figure 5** shows transition houses developed several outputs and outcomes, it would be beneficial if the Ministry and transition houses focused efforts on the key performance information the Ministry really wants from each transition house. For example, we would expect each transition house would track and report on number of survivors helped, number of turn-aways per month, and extent of services provided to survivors, which was not provided by all transition houses.

Having excessive and/or inconsistent key performance information increases the risk that transition houses use resources to track and report on information that is not providing value to the Ministry.

2. We recommend the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General determine key performance information required from transition houses.

Second-stage Houses

For the seven second-stage houses, the Ministry signed its first agreements with them in August 2023 which expire in March 2026.

We assessed second-stage house agreements and found service expectations consistent with good practice. Second-stage houses provide housing intervention and counselling support services for people with children leaving circumstances of violence and abuse.



Supportive programming is provided to residents of the second-stage houses that focuses on building skills which contribute to independent living.

Second-stage houses can also set performance outputs and outcomes. Examples of outputs established by second-stage houses include:

- Number of families housed
- Percentage of survivors attending one-on-one counselling sessions
- Number of referrals to external resources (e.g., mental health and addictions services, legal services)
- Percentage of women attending financial literacy and budgeting programs

We found these performance outputs focused on the main areas the Ministry needs reported to it.

Establishing adequate service expectations with transition and second-stage houses clearly outlining what is expected of operators allows the Ministry to evaluate the performance of transition and second-stage houses. Obtaining key performance information also enables the Ministry to determine whether funding provided to deliver services to survivors of interpersonal violence achieves the results intended.

4.4 Rationale Lacking for Funding

While transfer agreements set out annual funding, the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General has not rationalized its funding levels for transition or second-stage houses.

During transfer agreement negotiations (i.e., every three years), the Ministry and transition houses agree on funding levels for the next three years. Typically, this funding is similar to the prior agreement with economic factors considered (e.g., inflation).

Annually, during its own internal budgeting process, the Ministry requests approval from Cabinet for funds for transition houses. Cabinet may approve an increase during its budget considerations. If Cabinet grants an increase in funds, the Ministry applies the increase consistently across all transition houses by amending the appendix of the transfer agreement (e.g., each transition house gets a 3% increase regardless of whether they are operating with a surplus or deficit).

We found the Ministry's funding to transition houses increased by 12% in the past six years, from \$6.82 million in 2018–19 to \$7.66 million in 2024–25. Management indicated these funding increases were due to increased economic factors.

We expected the Ministry to have rationale for the funding levels provided to transition houses (e.g., per bed funding rate). For example, **Figure 4** shows that transition houses in Regina (WISH) and Swift Current have the same number of beds at 14, but funding levels differed by over \$200,000 for 2024–25. The Ministry could not explain why funding levels differed.

We anticipated funding for northern transition houses may be higher than southern locations due to cost-of-living differences. Consequently, we analyzed the Ministry's funding using a dollar-per-space formula and found wide-ranging funding variations. In 2023–24, transition house funding averaged \$34,895 per space (ranging from \$15,039 for a transition house in northern Saskatchewan [i.e., La Ronge] to \$51,113 for a transition house in southern Saskatchewan [i.e., Regina]) and an average of \$4,289 per survivor served (ranging from \$980 at the La Ronge transition house to \$6,666 at the Regina transition house).

Second-stage houses receive less funding than transition houses. As with transition houses, the Ministry did not have documented rationale for the funding levels provided to second-stage houses.

Without detailed funding analysis, the Ministry is unable to rationalize why a transition house with less spaces or fewer individuals served may receive more funding than a transition house with more spaces or more individuals served. This lack of analysis may lead to some overfunded transition spaces while others struggle to meet survivor needs.

3. We recommend the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General rationalize funding provided to community-based organizations operating transition and second-stage houses.

4.5 Regular Inspections of Transition Houses Required

The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General does not conduct regular inspections of transition houses as permitted under *The Residential Services Act*, and associated Regulations. Instead, it relies on transition houses' self-reporting of compliance with expected requirements.

The Ministry told us it requires its staff to visit each transition house twice annually. These visits do not cover what would be expected in an inspection (e.g., completed checklist confirming whether legislative requirements are actually met—see **Figure 3**).

Through discussions with transition house staff and review of Ministry staff calendars, we verified at least one visit to each transition house occurred in 2023–24. Ministry staff confirmed that these visits used to be regulatory but have since changed to be more focused on relationship management (e.g., having meetings offsite with the Executive Director of the transition house to discuss programming and any concerns).

Figure 3 outlines the requirements of *The Residential Services Regulations* that transition houses must annually self-report during licensing to the Ministry. Ministry staff should perform periodic (i.e., at least annual) inspections to verify the accuracy of information reported by transition houses. For example, confirm security measures are in place and working, and appropriate sleeping accommodations are provided.



Previously, Ministry staff would verify transition house spaces met minimum requirements established in *The Residential Services Regulations* (e.g., would measure rooms to ensure space met requirements). However, since spaces do not typically change size (i.e., unless renovation occurs), staff visits now focus on pressures the community-based organizations face and programming offered to survivors.

Not having Ministry staff physically observing whether transition houses meet established requirements (e.g., legislative requirements) and whether they deliver proper services, increases the risk that transition houses are not providing survivors with safe, supportive housing options when leaving interpersonal violence.

4. We recommend the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General periodically inspect transition houses to verify compliance with established requirements.

4.5.1 Safe Transition House Spaces Provided for Survivors

We visited two different types of transition houses (a single detached house converted into a transition house and a building combining both a homeless shelter and transition house). Both provided survivors with a well-maintained common space (e.g., TV room, reading room) and individual bedrooms that incorporated the minimum requirements outlined in *The Residential Services Regulations* (e.g., closet or wardrobe, bed, chair, bedding).

In addition to well-maintained spaces, the transition houses we visited included several precautions to keep survivors safe. The converted transition house included a fence (to keep children safe while playing in the yard), security cameras both inside and outside of the property, and entry through one door (allowing staff to see who entered and exited the house). The transition house in the shared building included an intercom (where residents and visitors spoke to staff before gaining access to the floor), and security cameras in common spaces throughout the floor.

4.5.2 Validation of Transition House Staff Training Required

Agreements between the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General and transition houses state staff must have minimum training requirements (e.g., database training, trauma-informed care training). However, there is no mechanism for the Ministry to verify that transition house staff attended required training.

During the annual licensing renewal process, the Ministry requires transition houses to report both mandatory and non-mandatory staff training offered (e.g., mandatory training can include CPR and first aid, non-mandatory may include cultural sensitivity training).

Figure 6 provides examples of training attended by transition house staff during 2023–24 based on transition house annual 2023–24 licence renewal forms.

Figure 6—2023–24 Training Attended by Transition House Staff

Training / Certification	Purpose
CPR / First Aid	Related to immediate assistance in a medical emergency
Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S)	Related to the safety, health, welfare, and wellbeing of people at their workplace

Training / Certification	Purpose
Critical Incident Reporting	Related to reporting actual or alleged events that create the risk of serious harm to the health or welfare of individuals receiving services
De-escalating potentially violent situations	Communication strategies to prevent or defuse potentially violent situations
Reconciliation – Calls to Action	Culturally appropriate training when survivors self-declare as Indigenous
Safe Talk	Four-hour training that equips people to be more alert to someone suicidal and better able to connect them with further help
Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)	Two-day interactive workshop in suicide first aid
Mandt	Comprehensive, integrated approach to preventing, de-escalating, and, if necessary, intervening when an individual's behaviour poses a threat of harm to themselves and/or others
Naloxone	Training tool on identifying opioid drug poisoning (overdose), and how to respond with a naloxone kit

Source: Adapted from information provided by transition houses and the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General.

While the Ministry expects transition house staff to receive certain training throughout the year (e.g., trauma-informed care) as outlined in its funding agreements, it does not verify all staff complete training at each transition house. For example, the Ministry could review supporting documentation (e.g., certificates of achievement, attendance records) showing whether staff attended the reported training sessions when conducting periodic inspections—see **Recommendation 4**.

Our review of mid-year and year-end reports submitted by transition houses in 2023–24 found only one out of 12 transition houses reported trauma-informed training as mandatory for staff, with at least one staff member having attended training during the year. If staff are not appropriately trained in trauma-informed care (i.e., how to speak to survivors who experienced trauma), it increases the risk of re-traumatizing survivors during interactions with staff.

Verifying transition house staff receive trauma-informed training can help transition houses better support survivors in addressing both immediate and long-term challenges and create an environment conducive to healing and recovery.

The Ministry's agreements with second-stage houses do not include minimum training requirements for staff. We find this reasonable because second-stage housing staff would have minimal interaction with survivors (e.g., fix repairs needed in units).

4.6 Verification of Periodic Criminal Record Checks Needed

The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's agreements with transition and second-stage houses state that board members, staff, and volunteers must submit a criminal record check. However, the Ministry neither verifies criminal record checks for staff working at houses upon initial licensing nor does it require proof of periodic ongoing criminal record checks.

We found one instance where a long-term employee at a transition house did not have a criminal record check on file.



Transfer agreements also state transition and second-stage houses must have criminal record checks for new employees and board members. The Ministry requires transition and second-stage houses to establish a policy for the frequency of criminal record check updates. For the three transition houses we tested, each had different requirements for criminal record checks.

In one instance, the transition house required staff to provide an annual declaration that no changes occurred to their criminal record or, if there were changes, outline the charges against them. In another, the transition house requires staff to submit updated criminal record checks every three years. The final transition house only required staff to submit criminal record checks prior to employment beginning and not periodically. It was at this transition house that we found one employee, who had been with the organization for several decades, and did not have a criminal record check on file.

The Ministry could review that required criminal record checks exist during its periodic inspections (see **Recommendation 4**).

Not obtaining criminal record checks from transition house staff could increase the risk to resident safety if a staff member has a criminal record, particularly one related to violence. The Ministry regularly confirming staff at transition and second-stage houses have criminal record checks supports a safe space for survivors.

5. We recommend the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General verify completion of periodic criminal record checks for people working with survivors of interpersonal violence living in transition and second-stage houses.

4.7 Reported Information Requires Analysis

While the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's reporting requirements for transition houses are consistent with good practice, we found information reported by transition houses not always accurate. The Ministry needs to continue working with transition houses to improve the quality and accuracy of information reported.

The Ministry's agreements with transition houses contain an appendix, which sufficiently outlines the frequency and reporting requirements transition houses must meet. This includes:

- **Monthly statistical summary:** transition houses report on turn-away statistics (including a break down of reasons for turning away survivors).
- **Mid-year outcomes and financial summary:** by November 15 each year, transition houses must report against established performance outcomes like improvement strategies to cope with distress and trauma symptoms and report on actual expenditures compared to budget. The Ministry includes an adequate template for reporting in its agreement.
- **Year-end outcomes and financial summary:** by May 31 each year, transition houses must report the final outcomes and actual expenditures compared to budget. The Ministry includes an adequate template for this reporting in its agreement.

- **Audited financial statements:** within two months of the transition house's fiscal year end, it must submit audited financial statements to the Ministry.

The Ministry uses a tracking sheet to ensure transition houses meet all reporting requirements. We tested two transition houses and found the Ministry received the reporting information as required. We found Ministry staff followed up (e.g., via email) when transition houses did not submit required reporting by the established deadline.

While reporting templates and frequency are consistent with good practice, we found the Ministry does not sufficiently analyze the accuracy or reasonableness of reporting.

The Ministry informed us that it also performs information checks on two different transition houses annually (i.e., physically comparing information reported to the Ministry by the transition house in its monthly statistical reporting to data tracked by the transition house); however, it was unable to provide evidence of these checks occurring. For example, we expected the Ministry to keep documentation (e.g., completed checklists, notes, findings, reports) of these information checks showing Ministry staff confirmed turn-away information reported by transition houses matched the monthly statistical reporting submitted. However, the Ministry did not have any records supporting these information checks occurred.

Transition houses use both manual (e.g., logbook) and IT systems to track information reported. Our review of the information the transition houses provided to the Ministry found inconsistencies in the reported information (e.g., total turn-aways reported did not match the breakdown report indicating reasons for turn-aways, report showed identical detailed statistical information two months in a row). The Ministry could review the accuracy of reported information during its periodic inspections (see **Recommendation 4**) or conduct further analysis to determine where errors may exist that need addressing (see **Recommendation 6**).

Obtaining complete reports and analyzing them can help the Ministry to identify emerging trends or specific needs in the community that enables proactive responses to changing circumstances.

The Ministry's agreements with second-stage houses included the same reporting requirements as transition houses. We could not examine information reported by second-stage houses or analyzed by the Ministry as reporting was not due until November 2024 (this includes information related to connecting survivors to appropriate supports).

4.8 Transition Houses Connect Survivors to Appropriate Supports

The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General appropriately set formal expectations for transition houses and second-stage houses to provide survivors with internal services (e.g., group sessions) and to refer survivors to necessary external service providers (e.g., Ministry of Social Services for income assistance). We found transition houses connect survivors to appropriate supports.

Survivors leaving situations of interpersonal violence can call the 24-hour crisis line of the transition house in their area (see **Section 5.0** for a list of transition houses across the province). The transition house asks a series of questions to determine whether the



survivor meets the mandate (i.e., is experiencing interpersonal violence) to receive services from the transition house. If the transition house has space, it will direct the survivor where to go. If the transition house is at capacity, it works with the survivor to find another space (i.e., at a different transition house or a different community-based organization such as a homeless shelter).

During the first 48 hours of a survivor arriving at a transition house, staff complete a survivor intake form, obtaining key information about the survivor, as well as their children and their abuser. Transition house staff also identify what services the survivor would benefit from receiving prior to departure.

Figure 7 outlines both the internal services and external referrals available to survivors.

Figure 7—Internal Services and External Referrals for Survivors

Internal Services	External Referrals
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crisis intervention• Clinical counselling• Case planning• Safety planning• Educational sessions—individual and group (e.g., healthy relationships)• Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Salvation Army (e.g., furniture)• Mental health and addictions services• Police (to report interpersonal violence)• Housing• Jordan's Principle (e.g., speech therapy)^A• Legal services (e.g., Saskatchewan Legal Aid Commission, family law)• Ministry of Social Services (income assistance)• Healthcare providers (e.g., dentist)

Source: Adapted from certain transition house records.

^A Jordan's Principle makes sure all Indigenous children living in Canada can access the products, services and supports they need, when they need them. Funding can help with a wide range of health, social and educational needs. sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1568396042341/1568396159824 (12 November 2024).

In addition to providing internal services, transition houses offer specific cultural requirements (e.g., dietary restrictions, customs). For Indigenous survivors, transition houses provide space for smudging rituals and provide access to Elders.

We tested 10 survivor files from three transition houses and found transition houses provided access to internal services and made appropriate referrals to external service providers for all services identified during survivor intake. We found one instance where staff offered a survivor access to internal services, but the survivor declined. We also found transition houses regularly followed up with external service providers on referrals made when timely access to services was not provided (e.g., low-income housing).

Connecting survivors of interpersonal violence with needed supports both internally and externally (through referrals) provides survivors with comprehensive, trauma-informed care that helps to rebuild lives, promotes safety, and fosters economic independence.

4.9 Analysis Needed to Determine Service Improvements

While the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General requires transition and second-stage houses to report key information throughout the year, it does not analyze these reports to determine whether transition houses need to make service improvements.

Good practice would have the Ministry use information reported by transition and second-stage houses to determine whether gaps exist in services provided by transition and second-stage houses and expectations in the agreements are met. For example, if the Ministry identifies a large number of youths turned away at certain transition houses, the Ministry could recommend the transition houses apply for an exemption to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to reside at the houses or identify areas of the province with higher demand.²¹

The Ministry told us it does not formally document its analysis of key performance outcomes because Ministry staff constantly communicate with transition and second-stage houses. Therefore, the Ministry assumes any concerns identified by operators in mid-year and year-end reporting (e.g., insufficient funding) would already be known to the Ministry by way of its constant communication.

Additionally, the Ministry acknowledges that transition houses are still working on creating accurate, improved reporting due to the new requirements in its 2024–27 transfer agreements. The Ministry expects transition houses to have meaningful reporting available to the Ministry by 2027—see **Recommendation 2** about determining and obtaining key performance information.

Our analysis of turn-away rates at Ministry-funded transition houses found that 18% of turn-aways that occurred between April 2023 and March 2024 resulted from capacity issues. The majority of turn-aways related to other reasons such as the individual not meeting the transition house’s mandate or having more complicated issues like substance abuse.

We acknowledge just because people and their children are turned away from a transition house, does not mean they must return home to their abuser. Transition houses at capacity can reach out to another transition house in proximity, use hotels, or reach out to other community-based organizations (e.g., homeless shelters). However, this highlights the need for the Ministry to conduct its own analysis to identify trends (e.g., areas of the province experiencing higher capacity pressures) and discuss results with interested parties (e.g., Provincial Association of Transition Houses) to develop solutions.

As of July 2024, the Ministry performed minimal reporting to senior management or to the public on transition houses and second-stage houses. For example, it provided information to management on the number of transition houses funded and amount of funding provided in 2019. As the Ministry works with transition houses to improve reporting accuracy and starts to conduct appropriate analysis, we would expect the Ministry to begin reporting key information to senior management about transition houses and second-stage houses (e.g., turn aways, serious incidents, rationalized funding).

Periodic analysis of turn-away rates and other key performance information and reporting results to senior management can help the Ministry identify trends or specific needs in the community and support proactive responses to changing circumstances.

6. We recommend the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General analyze and report key performance information including turn-away statistics for transition and second-stage houses to determine strategies to address shortfalls.

²¹ Transition houses must apply to the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General to receive an exemption allowing 16- and 17-year-olds who are seeking shelter for themselves without parental supervision. These transition houses must have processes in place to provide age-appropriate support and supervision (e.g., curfew, age-appropriate boundaries).



4.10 Serious Incidents Required to be Reported for Transition Houses

In its Program Standards Report that transition houses complete as part of the annual licence renewal process, the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General appropriately outlines the requirement for transition houses to report serious incidents.

The Program Standards Report requires transition houses to report:

- Emergency first aid administered and instances of serious illness or injury to any survivor
- Whether the transition house has a critical incident policy in place
- Incidents of child abuse or neglect (reported to the Ministries of Justice and Attorney General and Social Services)

Expecting transition houses to report serious incidents to the Ministry allows it to adequately address and respond to serious incidents.

For the period April 2023 to July 2024, no serious incidents were reported to the Ministry by transition houses. For the three transition houses we visited, we verified no serious incidents that required reporting occurred.

5.0 TRANSITION HOUSES AND SECOND-STAGE HOUSES IN SASKATCHEWAN AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2024

Community	Shelter Name	Transition House or Second-Stage House	Phone Number
North Battleford	Battlefords Interval House ^A	Transition	306-445-2742
Saskatoon	Saskatoon Interval House ^A	Transition	306-244-0185
	YWCA Saskatoon Turning Points ^C	Transition (Enhanced Residential)	306-244-2844
	Adelle House ^B	Second-Stage	306-668-2761
	Turning Points ^B	Second-Stage	306-244-2844
Regina	Regina Transition House ^A	Transition	306-569-2292
	YWCA Isabel Johnson Shelter ^{A, B}	Transition and Second-Stage	306-525-2141
	Wichihik Iskwewak Safe House ^{A, B}	Transition and Second-Stage	306-543-0493
	Sakeenah	Transition	1-888-671-3446 Ext 141
	SOFIA House ^B	Second-Stage	306-565-6060
Moose Jaw	Moose Jaw Transition House ^A	Transition	306-693-6511
Black Lake	Ts'ekwi K'oni Koe ^D	Transition	306-439-2777

Community	Shelter Name	Transition House or Second-Stage House	Phone Number
La Ronge	Piwapan Women's Centre ^A	Transition	306-425-4090
	Sapohetwin House ^B	Second-Stage	306-425-3900
Meadow Lake	Waskoosis Safe Shelter ^D	Transition	306-236-5570
Prince Albert	Prince Albert Safe Shelter for Women ^{A, B}	Transition and Second-Stage	306-764-7233
	YWCA Prince Albert ^C	Transition (Enhanced Residential)	306-763-8571
Melfort	Northeast Outreach & Support Services ^{A, B}	Transition and Second-Stage	306-752-9455
Lloydminster (Alberta)	Lloydminster Interval Home (SPARK Foundation of Lloydminster) ^B	Transition	780-875-0966
Yorkton	Shelwin House ^A	Transition	306-783-7233
	Project Safe Haven ^D	Transition	306-782-0676
Fort Qu'Appelle	Qu'Appelle Haven Safe Shelter ^D	Transition	306-332-6882
Swift Current	Southwest Crisis Services ^A	Transition	306-778-3386

Source: Adapted from Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan. pathssk.org/get-help-now/ (12 November 2024).

^A The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General licenses and funds these transition houses.

^B The Ministry provides funding to these second-stage houses and one transition house.

^C The Ministry classifies these organizations as Enhanced Residential Homes and provides funding.

^D These organizations are run by First Nations and are under Federal Government jurisdiction.

6.0 SELECTED REFERENCES

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