

Chapter 7

Social Services—Monitoring Group Homes Providing Care to Children

1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Ministry of Social Services funds and licenses community-based organizations that operate group homes to provide a home-like setting for children in care. At September 2025, the Ministry licensed 177 group homes with 885 children in care at those group homes in Saskatchewan.

We audited the Ministry of Social Services' processes to monitor group homes providing care to children and found it had effective processes, except it needs to:

- **Centrally track and analyze key information (e.g., serious incidents, serious complaints investigated, deficiencies identified during detailed reviews)** related to group homes caring for children. Without centrally tracking and analyzing results, the Ministry cannot determine trends or identify recurring concerns (e.g., common non-compliance concerns), which limits its ability to provide additional guidance or support to all homes when similar concerns arise.
- **Conduct detailed reviews of group homes caring for children using a formal risk-based approach.** Detailed reviews help assess the quality of care provided and that children receive the appropriate level of support and services.

The Ministry does not set an annual schedule, based on risk, for its detailed reviews or consider risk in determining how many reviews to conduct. We found 71% (126 homes) have not had a detailed review completed for over five years, with one home last reviewed over 20 years ago.

- **Provide timely findings reports to group homes within a reasonably set timeframe following its detailed review.**

Our testing found the Ministry provided two findings reports to group home operators 113 and 127 business days after the review, which exceeded our expectation of 30 business days to complete reporting. Further analysis found the Ministry had not issued some findings reports up to 511 business days after it completed detailed reviews (at the time of our testing).

- **Track the status of corrective action plans to confirm group homes address deficiencies (i.e., non-compliance)** identified during detailed reviews. Not tracking the status of group homes' corrective action plans to respond to non-compliance concerns increases the risk that deficiencies go unaddressed.

Proper monitoring of group homes for children in care is crucial to ensure the wellbeing, safety, and proper development of vulnerable children.



2.0 INTRODUCTION

We audited the Ministry of Social Services' processes to monitor group homes providing care to children.

Our audit did not include protocol homes as these homes are operated by First Nations organizations within their First Nations communities and are primarily funded by the Federal Government.

2.1 Responsibility for Monitoring Group Homes

The Child and Family Services Act requires the Minister of Social Services to investigate reports of abuse and neglect if any reasonable grounds exist to believe a child needs protection due to physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect. The Ministry of Social Services provides care for children requiring protection and out-of-home care.

The Residential Services Act and *The Residential Services Regulations* give the Ministry authority to license and monitor residential services facilities (group homes) providing care to children. The Ministry funds and partners with community-based organizations to provide a home-like setting as a healthy, nurturing, and supportive living environment for children in care.

Children only come into care as a last resort if they are unsafe at home. Those in need of protection may be experiencing complex issues such as physical or sexual violence, or a parent experiencing addiction or mental health crisis.¹ The Ministry may place children in out-of-home care with extended family networks, foster homes, or group homes. Children may be placed in group homes in the following circumstances:

- In case of emergency (i.e., short-term)—when a child is first apprehended and has no extended family member or foster home available
- Older youth (e.g., aged 16–17) who are moving toward independence and where foster care is unlikely to meet their needs
- Children or youth with developmental needs

2.2 Group Homes in Saskatchewan

The Ministry of Social Services tries to first place children with extended family, whenever possible, to keep them connected to their family, culture, and community.² When family-based care is not possible, children and youth may be placed in group homes.

Group homes are meant to provide a safe and supportive environment for children who cannot live with their biological families due to neglect, abuse, or other challenging circumstances. Group homes are responsible for providing a range of services, which can include education, counseling, emotional support, and medical care. At September 2025, the Ministry had about 900 spaces with 885 children in care at 177 licensed group homes.

¹ Ministry of Social Services, *Child Welfare Stats Q4 2024–25*, p. 1.

² www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/family-and-social-support/child-welfare-statistics (9 March 2026).

As shown in **Figure 1**, the number of children in group homes continues to increase in Saskatchewan. This may be partly due to the decrease in foster homes available, which have declined by over 50 homes since 2020.

Figure 1—Number of Children in Group Homes and Foster Homes Available from March 31, 2020–25

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	September 30, 2025
Children in Group Homes	634	779	734	795	822	875	885
Number of Foster Homes	505	489	467	462	458	469	451

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Social Services records and *Child Welfare Stats Q4 2024–25*.

The Ministry reports that Indigenous children and youth represent a disproportionately high percentage of children in out-of-home care in Saskatchewan, as is the case across Canada. The Ministry notes, at September 30, 2025, 80% of children in care (foster care, group homes, extended family) are Indigenous.³ This supports the need for group homes to provide culturally safe care.

The Ministry must ensure children placed in group homes are well cared for and safe. Ongoing monitoring helps confirm that group homes comply with legislative standards and follow good practice, which builds trust with children, families, and the broader community. Regular checks also ensure these homes consistently deliver services and care in meeting established standards as well as meeting children’s emotional, cultural, and physical development needs.

In March 2021, the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth reported on investigating accusations of neglect and abuse at a Saskatoon group home.⁴ Based on the findings, the Advocate made recommendations to the Ministry including the need to enhance and redesign its group home oversight and accountability structure, and to improve its process for identifying and verifying the qualifications and training of group home staff.⁵

Proper monitoring of group homes for children in care is crucial to ensure the wellbeing, safety, and proper development of vulnerable children.

3.0 AUDIT CONCLUSION

We concluded for the 12-month period ending November 30, 2025, the Ministry of Social Services had, other than the following areas, effective processes to monitor group homes providing care to children.

³ www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/family-and-social-support/child-welfare-statistics (9 March 2026)

⁴ www.saskadvocate.ca/someone-to-watch-over-us/ (9 March 2026).

⁵ Ministry of Social Services management noted the Ministry has worked to address the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth’s recommendations by enhancing procurement processes for group home development, as well as implementing the Operational Oversight Unit that provides support and training to group homes.



The Ministry of Social Services needs to:

- **Centrally track and analyze key information (e.g., licences, serious incidents, serious complaints investigated, deficiencies identified during detailed reviews) related to group homes caring for children**
- **Conduct detailed reviews of group homes caring for children using a formal risk-based approach**
- **Issue detailed review findings reports to group homes caring for children within a reasonably set timeframe**
- **Track the status of corrective action plans to confirm group homes address deficiencies identified during detailed reviews**

Figure 2—Audit Objective, Criteria, and Approach

Audit Objective:

To assess whether the Ministry of Social Services had effective processes, for the 12-month period ending November 30, 2025, to monitor group homes providing care to children.

Audit Criteria:

Processes to:

1. Determine group homes capable of caring for children

- Maintain appropriate standards (e.g., residential services manual, checklists) that align with legislation and good practice
- Issue appropriate annual licences to eligible group homes
- Communicate standards

2. Periodically assess group homes

- Conduct risk-based inspections of homes to confirm standards are followed
- Properly investigate critical incidents reported by homes and serious complaints reported by clients/families/public timely
- Address identified non-compliance timely

3. Analyze the provision of services delivered by group homes

- Maintain effective quality control processes (e.g., monitor Ministry staff compliance with inspection requirements)
- Monitor fulfillment of individual child care plans
- Regularly analyze information about homes (e.g., incidents, quality of care, capacity, required funding)
- Report on homes' care for children to 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 Social Services' processes, we used the above criteria based on our related work, review of literature including reports from other auditors, and consultations with management. Ministry management agreed with the above criteria.

We examined Ministry policies and procedures related to monitoring group homes providing care to children. We assessed the Ministry's processes to license group home operators for compliance with legislation. We tested a sample of licensing packages, group home detailed reviews, and serious incidents to assess whether staff followed the Ministry's established processes.

4.0 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Appropriate Care Standards Maintained and Communicated

The Ministry of Social Services appropriately maintains care standards for operating group homes and communicates changes to its standards to both Ministry staff and community-based organizations (i.e., group home operators).

The Ministry maintains two key manuals, which outline the requirements for group home operations—the Residential Services Manual and the Youth Centred Services Manual. **Figure 3** details more information about what the Ministry included in each manual.

Figure 3—Purpose of Residential Services and Youth Centred Services Manuals

Manual	Purpose
Residential Services	<p>To provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provincially recognized standards of care to ensure residential care and case management practices effectively respond to each child's individual developmental needs, support healthy personal, cultural, and social wellbeing, and encourage family reunification wherever possible <p>To ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential care and services provided to children and youth of First Nation, Inuit, or Métis heritage fully respects Indigenous family values and cultural beliefs Residential care services respect the rights of children and their families <p>The Manual provides comprehensive policies group homes must follow in providing care to children residing in group homes.</p>
Youth Centred Services	<p>To support a parenting approach that promotes the active participation of youth in the decisions affecting them in their transition from adolescence to adulthood, and toward successful independence.</p> <p>The Manual outlines how to care for 16–17-year-old children in group homes to provide them with the skills necessary to achieve independence in adulthood.</p>

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Social Services Residential Services and Youth Centred Services Manuals.

We compared both Manuals to legislative requirements (i.e., *The Residential Services Regulations*) and found both aligned. The Ministry used these Manuals to establish templates and checklists Ministry staff use to ensure practices align with licensing requirements (**Section 4.3**) and to perform detailed reviews of group homes (**Section 4.6**). The Ministry makes both Manuals available online to Ministry staff, group home operators, and the public.⁶

The Ministry's Program and Service Design and Community Services Branches work with their respective units (e.g., Policy, Quality Assurance and Improvement, Residential Services, Family Based Care) and group home operators to develop, review, and update its policies and manuals. We found the Ministry also consults with other jurisdictions on specific matters (e.g., potential installation of chimes on exterior doors) to ensure its manuals remain aligned with good practice.

⁶ publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/31499 (23 March 2026).



We found the Ministry regularly updates its Residential Services Manual (last updated September 2025) and properly communicated changes to both staff and group home operators. Although we found the Ministry has not updated the Youth Centred Services Manual since 2013, it still aligned with current legislative requirements.

Clear expectations for both Ministry staff monitoring group homes and for group home operators are essential to contributing to the safety and wellbeing of children in Ministry care.

4.2 Monitoring Expectations Established

The Ministry of Social Services established sufficient requirements to monitor group homes providing care to children.

Community-based organizations operate group homes for children requiring out-of-home care and must operate according to the requirements and standards under legislation. At September 2025, the Ministry had 885 children in care at 177 licensed group homes. Group homes provide care to between 2–10 children at a time.

The Ministry tracks the number of spaces, age ranges of children, program type (e.g., medically fragile, short-term placement, long-term care) and approved funding for the last two fiscal years for each group home. In 2025–26, the Ministry approved funding of \$132.5 million (2024–25: \$120.2 million) for its group homes.

The Ministry is responsible for monitoring group homes to ensure the children living there receive safe and appropriate care. As shown in **Figure 4**, the Ministry reasonably monitors the provision of care through various ways by staff in different Ministry units.

Figure 4—Types of Monitoring Conducted by Various Ministry Units

Monitoring Type	Monitoring Purpose	Frequency	Unit Responsible
Physical Standards Inspection	Assesses physical requirements of a facility including home maintenance; designated areas (lounging, dining, sleeping areas); bedroom furnishings; washing facilities; safety equipment; common area; study space; outdoor space; accessibility; and medication storage.	Annual (prior to licensing and renewal)	Community-based Organization Administration Unit 13 staff
Program Standards Inspection	Ensures homes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide quality resident care, including adequate meals • Offer social/recreational interactions • Provide appropriate medication/medical treatments; and maintain proper records • Maintain resident support plans, and policies such as confidentiality, conflict of interest, and serious incident policies • Complete criminal record checks of staff • Inform residents of their rights and privileges 	Annual	Community Service Development Unit 5 staff

Monitoring Type	Monitoring Purpose	Frequency	Unit Responsible
Detailed Reviews	Reviews in detail the services, practices, and the quality of care provided to children (e.g., emergency medical treatment, supervision of children) by the group home to determine whether homes meet the requirements set out in the Residential Services Manual.	Ad hoc	Residential Services Unit 7 staff
Serious Incident Reporting	Homes are required to report all serious incidents to Ministry case workers. The Ministry tracks and assesses each incident to determine impact level (i.e., medium, high) and summarizes results annually for all children under Ministry care (e.g., in foster care, group homes).	As needed	Quality Assurance Unit 8 staff
Serious Complaints (i.e., allegations)	Ministry staff assess allegations of child abuse and neglect in group homes to determine whether an investigation is warranted and summarize results quarterly.	As needed	Provincial Resource Assessment Team 6 staff Residential Services Unit 7 staff

Source: Adapted from information provided by the Ministry of Social Services.

Clear monitoring expectations reduce the risk that the Ministry may not be adequately reviewing group homes for gaps in care and the safety and wellbeing of children in care may be compromised.

4.3 Group Homes Licensed Annually

The Ministry of Social Services annually licenses group homes providing care to children.

The Residential Services Act and *The Residential Services Regulations* outline licensing requirements for group homes.

When licensing a new home or renewing a licence of an existing home, the Ministry requires a documentation package from the group home that includes third-party reports such as fire, health, and sprinkler inspections, as well as proof of appropriate insurance coverage.

In addition, when licensing a new group home, the Ministry requires homes to submit other reports such as building inspections, zoning, occupancy permits, and floor plans. Group homes must also confirm completed criminal record checks for all adults living at the home and completed mandatory training (e.g., Crisis Intervention, Suicide Intervention, First Aid and CPR, Medication Administration, Indigenous Cultural Training) for group home staff.

The Ministry also requires its staff to physically inspect the home prior to issuing a licence. **Figure 5** outlines what Ministry staff evaluate during physical standards inspections that assess homes' physical safety and design. The Ministry uses a checklist to help ensure staff collect and assess the appropriateness of all required documents and conduct appropriate physical inspections prior to issuing an operating licence.



Figure 5—Areas Reviewed During Physical Standards Inspections

- 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 bed per child, no more than two children in one bedroom)
- Bedroom furnishings (e.g., storage for personal belongings)
- Washroom facilities (e.g., at least one wash basin and a toilet for every five children)
- Exits (e.g., all exits equipped with easy-to-use hardware)
- Safety equipment (e.g., where required: nightlights, non-skid bathmats)
- Appropriate spaces for day room, study space, yard
- Accessibility (e.g., appropriate equipment for clients with physical disabilities)
- Medical treatment (e.g., first aid supplies available)
- Medication (e.g., locked medicine cabinet)

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Social Services records.

We compared the Ministry’s licensing requirements to other Canadian jurisdictions (e.g., Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba) and found they aligned.

We tested documentation received from the one new group home the Ministry licensed during our audit period (December 2024 to November 2025) and found the group home adequately met the Ministry’s requirements and received a licence to operate.

We tested 15 existing homes with licences renewed in our audit period and found all were appropriately licensed (i.e., physical standards inspection completed). None of the 15 group homes tested operated with an expired licence. We also found the Ministry properly approved all the licences.

In January 2023, legislation changed related to the licensing requirements for group homes. Previously, legislation required third-party reports, a physical standards inspection, and a program standards inspection before it issued a new or renewed licence. Legislation now states the Ministry may inspect a home prior to issuing a licence, but it does not indicate the type (e.g., physical or program standards inspection).

The Ministry no longer requires a program standards inspection prior to issuing a licence. The program standards inspection assesses whether homes adhere to specific sections of the Residential Services Manual. **Figure 6** sets out the areas reviewed during a program standards inspection.

Figure 6—Summary of Areas Covered During Program Standards Inspections

- Services and programs (e.g., home provides care in a family-like setting)
- Meals (e.g., nutritionally based)
- Social/recreational interaction and program supplies (e.g., opportunity to enjoy social life)
- Personal records (e.g., complete records of individual programming for each child)
- Medical treatment protocols (e.g., call physician in case of serious illness)
- Medication (e.g., only medication authorized by a physician)
- Staff training in child-care policies, personal planning for children
- Staff criminal record and vulnerable sector checks

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Social Services records.

Management indicated it still tries to complete program standards inspections each year. If staff identify concerns, a group home's licence may be affected (i.e., the Ministry could revoke the licence and issue a conditional licence).

We tested 15 group homes and found the Ministry completed:

- Eight program standards inspections prior to renewing licences
- Five inspections within the same month as renewing licences (6–30 days after licence issuance)
- Two inspections took place approximately 10 months after licence issuance

We found the Ministry did not identify concerns in any of the 15 inspections.

We attended both a physical standards inspection and a program standards inspection. We found each take about an hour to complete. We found Ministry staff discussed the inspection with group home staff, reviewed the required documentation, and completed the required checklist. As noted in **Figure 4**, two different Ministry units complete these inspections. We suggest the Ministry assess whether it is reasonable and/or efficient for two different units to complete these inspections. It should also assess whether program standards inspections should occur prior to renewing a licence.

Annual licensing ensures only those homes meeting requirements continue to operate in providing care to children.

4.4 Conditional Licences Tracked and Deficiencies Resolved

The Ministry of Social Services issues conditional licences to group homes when deficiencies or delays in receipt of required documentation during the annual licence renewal process occurs. The Ministry tracks resolution of conditional licence deficiencies prior to issuing a full annual licence.

A conditional licence allows a group home to continue to operate for a shorter duration (e.g., 1–3 months) because of a deficiency or outstanding documentation. For example, the Ministry issues a conditional licence when it finds a group home not compliant with an inspection requirement (e.g., home missing an emergency light at the back door), or certain reports required for licence renewal remained outstanding by the licence expiration date (e.g., third-party health inspection report not provided on time).

Issuing a conditional licence means Ministry staff will return to the home sooner than annually for inspection to assess whether a home operator resolved a deficiency. The Ministry can issue conditional licences for a period of up to six months.

The Ministry maintains a spreadsheet of all group home licences. It tracks licence number and expiry date, type (e.g., conditional), and reasons for the conditional licence (e.g., inspection reports outstanding, identified deficiencies not addressed).

Our analysis of the licences, as at September 2025, found 21 group homes with conditional licences ranging from 1–3 months in duration.



We tested 15 existing homes with licences renewed in our audit period and found the Ministry appropriately issued conditional licences for six of them. In most cases, the Ministry issued a conditional licence because a fire or health inspection had not been completed. For three of these conditional licences, the Ministry received the appropriate supporting documentation (e.g., a completed health inspection report) and subsequently issued full licences. The conditional licence period had not passed at the time of our testing for the other three conditional licences.

Tracking and addressing deficiencies identified during inspections within a reasonable timeframe ensures children live in safe conditions while residing in group homes.

4.5 Risk-Based Plans Needed for Detailed Reviews of Homes

The Ministry of Social Services does not use a risk-based approach for conducting detailed reviews of group homes providing care to children.

The Ministry conducts detailed reviews at a few group homes each year to confirm whether homes meet select standards of care as required by the Residential Services Manual. The Ministry conducted four reviews in 2024–25 (2025–26: six up to November 2025). These reviews typically require Ministry staff to be onsite for three days. **Figure 7** sets out the key areas covered under the detailed reviews.

Figure 7—Key Areas Covered Under Detailed Reviews

- **Program and Services Delivery** (e.g., admission procedures, behavioural support requirements, aquatic activities, right to view and treat hair as sacred)
- **Personal Care** (e.g., medical, dental, and optical care; emergency medical treatment; medication administration, general health and hygiene; sleeping accommodations)
- **Human Resources** (e.g., staff training and development; night duties for staff)
- **Safety Measures** (e.g., emergency first aid kits)
- **Critical Incident Response** (e.g., self-harm and suicidal behaviour; management of severe behaviour; children who run/are at risk of running away; reporting of incidents; investigations of abuse allegations against group homes)
- **Child Care and Safety** (e.g., nutrition; supervision of children; emergency communication; home safety and storage; equipment and furnishings)

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Social Services Residential Services Manual—Policy and Standards Measured by Residential Services Unit.

The Ministry does not set an annual schedule, based on risk, for its detailed reviews or to determine how many reviews to conduct. The Ministry indicated it considers its last completed review, the ages of the children residing at a group home, and number of allegations (e.g., abuse, neglect, quality of care), if any, it received in the prior year. The Ministry could not provide evidence of how it prioritized when it conducts detailed reviews.

A risk-based approach should involve prioritizing detailed reviews of group homes based on the likelihood of significant negative outcomes such as:

- Reported critical incidents where the home's care contributed to incidents
- Public concerns or complaints (i.e., allegations) resulting in investigations or quality of care concerns

➤ Deficiencies identified during physical standards or program standards inspections

The Ministry has begun tracking when it completed its last detailed reviews at various group homes. Management indicated the tracking document is a work-in-progress and not yet complete.⁷ Our analysis of the tracking document found 71% (126 homes) have not had a detailed review completed for over five years, with one home last reviewed over 20 years ago.

We tested three group homes without a detailed review since 2017 and found all three homes had allegations related to staff and/or quality of care between December 2024 and October 2025. Detailed reviews help assess the quality of care provided and that children receive the appropriate level of support and services.

The Ministry has six staff and one manager in its Residential Services Unit who are responsible for completing detailed reviews. These staff are also responsible for the management and oversight of quality-of-care concerns. Once the Ministry takes a risk-based approach for detailed reviews that prioritizes homes with higher likelihoods of poor care outcomes, it will also need to analyze whether it has sufficient staff and resources to carry them out.

Not formally assessing risks when planning detailed reviews of group homes does not allow the Ministry to effectively prioritize reviewing high-risk group homes first. This can delay identifying and addressing key areas of non-compliance that impact those children's safety and wellbeing.

1. We recommend the Ministry of Social Services use a risk-based approach for conducting its detailed reviews at group homes caring for children to confirm quality of care provided.

4.6 Detailed Reviews of Homes Appropriately Conducted but Results Not Reported Timely

The Ministry of Social Services completes detailed reviews of group homes to ensure homes adhere to the Residential Services Manual requirements and adequately summarizes its findings, but it does not report results to group home operators timely.

As outlined in **Section 4.5**, the Ministry's Residential Services Unit staff perform detailed reviews at a select few group homes annually. The Ministry appropriately requires staff to shadow an experienced reviewer on detailed reviews before they conduct their own review.

Staff use comprehensive checklists outlining interview questions (for both group home staff and for children residing in the home), visual inspection requirements, and documentation requirements for children in care (see **Section 4.7** regarding individual case planning for children in care).

⁷ The Ministry of Social Services' tracking document also included protocol homes (group homes owned and operated by First Nations agencies), which are not included in our audit.



4.6.1 Interviews of Children and Group Home Staff Conducted

The Ministry interviews all group home staff and any children in the home who are old enough to respond to questions (i.e., typically children over age of four). Responses provide the Ministry with a deeper understanding of how a home operates. **Figure 8** sets out examples of the lines of inquiry asked during these interviews. Each interview with staff takes approximately two hours to complete and approximately 30 minutes with each child (or as long as the child's attention span allows).

Figure 8—Examples of Group Home Operator and Child Interview Areas of Inquiry

For Group Home Operators:

- Staff training and development (e.g., orientation, training courses)
- Behavioural support (e.g., daily routines, accommodations for individual child needs, rules/expectations in the home, methods of preventing challenging child behaviour)
- Rights of children (e.g., approval obtained before child's hair cut)
- Personal care of children (e.g., medical appointments, medication administration/storage, teaching of hygiene practices)
- Living accommodations and transport (e.g., how is bedroom selection made, transportation properly maintained, night staff performing bedroom checks, emergency first aid kit location, safe sleeping practices for young children)
- Critical incident reporting (e.g., ways staff intervene with violent child, process to report critical incident, how to deal with threats of self harm, process followed if child reports abuse)

For Children Residing at Group Home:

- What child likes and does not like about living in home
- If child has access to things they enjoy (e.g., phone calls with family, personal items)
- How the home involves the child in their culture
- Medical appointments booked
- Nutrition (e.g., do you like the food, what happens if food is not finished, are snacks available)
- Rules (e.g., what are the rules and what happens if not followed)
- Privacy (e.g., do staff knock before entering bedrooms)
- Safety (e.g., does child feel safe in the home)

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Social Services records.

For the three detailed reviews at group homes we tested, we found the Ministry appropriately completed interviews with both group home operators and children.

We attended one detailed review conducted by the Ministry in February 2026 and found Ministry staff interviewed all group home staff and two children (i.e., only children in the home old enough to comprehend the questions) and appropriately used the templates to document the interviews.

4.6.2 Visual Inspections of Homes Completed

Visual inspections performed by Ministry staff during detailed reviews are more extensive than physical standards inspections performed during licensing (**Section 4.3**). Inspection checklists include the following areas:

- Evacuation and fire safety (e.g., confirming exterior doors are easy for residents to open)

- Safe storage (e.g., observation of safely stored medication, medication administration logs kept, cleaning supplies locked away)
- Health and medical (e.g., observe home's first aid kit, child allergies documented, quality food provided, food available for snacking, evidence of children's laundry done)
- Sleeping accommodations (e.g., shared rooms, each child has own bed, personal belongings of children stored in bedroom, adequate storage for clothing, no locks on bedroom door)
- Self-harm safety precautions (e.g., use of curtain rods, clothing hanging rods that "break away" allowing them to not support a child's body weight for safety reasons)
- Living accommodations (e.g., yard fenced, rights of children posted, Advocate for Children and Youth contact information posted, private spaces available for phone calls, secure storage for children's belongings)
- Program vehicle (e.g., winter travel and first aid kits, no visible markings on vehicle, maintenance logs maintained)
- Infant safety (e.g., baby gates, electrical outlets covered, electrical cords secured, shelving secured to walls, cribs free of pillows)⁸

For all three detailed reviews we tested, we found the Ministry appropriately completed the visual inspection checklist.

During our attendance at a detailed review in February 2026, we found Ministry staff completed a visual inspection of the home and appropriately used the templates to document their findings.

4.6.3 Findings Adequately Documented but Not Reported Timely

The Ministry compiles findings from a detailed review into a report reviewed by several levels of Ministry management prior to sharing findings with the group home. Findings reports are not always shared timely. **Figure 9** sets out the information included in a detailed review findings report.

Figure 9—Detailed Review Findings Report Information

- Description of the group home (services offered, age of children housed, staffing)
- Statistics on the number of interviews performed during review, number of files reviewed, number of critical incident reports reviewed
- Statistics on the group home's occupancy (average utilization rate, number of children served over the year, average length of stay, shortest and longest placements, average age of children in care)
- Findings (areas where service met standards, areas for improvement)
- Recommendations broken down by timeline to address
- Assessment of the adequacy of the group home's policy and procedure manual

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Social Services records.

⁸ Adapted from Ministry of Social Services records.



After the reviewer drafts the findings report with recommendations, several levels of Ministry management also review the draft report prior to the Ministry sending the draft report to the group home for their review. The Ministry's Executive Director approves the final report. We found the Ministry has not set an expected timeframe for completing and sending findings reports to group homes timely. Once the Ministry shares its findings report with a group home, it schedules a meeting to discuss the findings.

For the three detailed reviews tested, we found one review occurred in September 2025 and the Ministry had not yet prepared the findings report at the time of our testing (70 days after the review occurred). The remaining two detailed reviews had findings reports provided to group home operators 113 and 127 business days respectively after the review, which exceeded our expectation of 30 business days to complete reporting. We found these findings reports included concerns such as group home staff giving a child medication without confirming they ingested the medication (i.e., staff walked away without observation) and failing to report serious incidents to the Ministry timely.

The Ministry also maintains a spreadsheet tracking detailed reviews conducted since October 2023. It includes the name of the group home, final day of onsite visit, findings meeting date, final report released date, comments, and who conducted the review.

Between October 2023 and November 2025, the Ministry conducted detailed reviews at 19 group homes. Our analysis found:

- Ten reviews conducted but no findings report issued at the time of our testing (2–511 business days after the completed review)
- Nine findings reports issued over 30 business days after the onsite review (ranging from 113–482 business days)

Not reporting detailed review findings timely to group home operators increases the risk that homes do not address identified deficiencies timely, which impacts the quality of care children receive.

2. We recommend the Ministry of Social Services issue detailed review findings reports to group homes caring for children within a reasonably set timeframe.

4.7 Individual Case Plans for Children in Care Monitored

The Ministry of Social Services verifies during its detailed reviews that group home operators keep individual case plans for children in their care.

The Ministry's Residential Services Manual mandates group home operators complete a Child Care Update Report for all children residing in a home, which requires operators to document information on each child's:

- Health (e.g., medical appointments, diagnosis, medications administered, fever tracking, any specialists including notes from appointments)
- Education (e.g., grade, school, teacher, date enrolled)

- Family involvement (e.g., which family members the child can have contact with and method of contact such as in-person supervised visits or phone calls)
- Cultural plan (e.g., cultural events such as pow-wows, round dances)
- Connection to community and recreation (e.g., extracurricular activities)
- Strengths and what works well for the child (e.g., documentation on child's favourite colour, activity, methods that work to address behavioural concerns)⁹

The method in which the group home operators track this information differs. Some operators have case management software that electronically documents all required information in one easy-to-find location. Other group home operators use handwritten notes to document requirements. Regardless of the method used, Ministry staff ensure all required information is documented for each child in the home during the detailed reviews.

During our attendance at a detailed program review in February 2026, we found Ministry staff appropriately reviewed the group home's records to ensure it documented required information about the children in the home.

Periodically reviewing whether group home operators complete individual case plans helps the Ministry determine whether children receive quality care in a group home.

4.8 Status of Action Plans from Detailed Reviews Not Tracked

The Ministry of Social Services requires group homes to document corrective action plans to address recommendations made during detailed reviews of homes. The Ministry does not track the status of action plans to confirm group homes address non-compliance concerns identified during reviews.

During detailed reviews, Ministry staff often find deficiencies (i.e., non-compliant areas in a group home). Where Ministry staff identify a significant concern to children's safety and wellbeing, they report it to the group home operator immediately for resolution. For example, during our observation of a detailed review in February 2026, we found when reviewers identified issues (e.g., dressers not bolted to walls) that group homes should remedy immediately, they spoke to the group home staff to resolve the issue while onsite.

For other, less significant deficiencies, the Ministry waits to inform the group home via a recommendation in its findings report. Management indicated it informally discusses the findings with the group home prior to the group home receiving the findings report.

Once a group home receives the Ministry's findings report and recommendations (including timeframe for implementation), the Ministry requires the group home to complete an action plan detailing how it plans to address the recommendation(s). We found the Ministry typically allows 1–3 months or 3–6 months for a group home to address its recommendations depending on the severity of the deficiency and the nature of the corrective action.

⁹ Ministry of Social Services, Residential Services Manual, p. 33.



For example, if the Ministry recommends a home clarify a standard (e.g., reporting procedures for allegations against group home staff), the Ministry allows the home 1–3 months to complete staff meetings/refresher training. The Ministry allows up to 120 days for some items such as policy revisions to allow for drafting and group home operator's board approval of the policy change.

Ministry staff request proof of action when group homes notify it that they addressed recommendations. For example, if a group home needed to secure shelves, the Ministry may request photo evidence or may visit the group home to observe the correction. If action plans do not lead to a follow-up onsite visit, the Ministry requests and reviews documents that support the action (e.g., review amended policy).

We found the Ministry does not centrally record recommendations and expected corrective actions, or implementation. The Ministry needs to know the status of implementation to effectively oversee actions group homes take to prevent future non-compliance.

For the three detailed program reviews we tested, we found two group homes submitted completed action plans, while one group home had not because it had not received the findings report from the Ministry (see **Recommendation 2** regarding the need for the Ministry to provide group home operators with timely findings reports). For the two group homes with action plans:

- The Ministry set a deadline of 1–3 months to complete the recommendations for one group home.

For example, the Ministry recommended amending the home's written policy to include guidelines for conducting bedroom searches to align with the Residential Services Manual as the reviewer found group home staff searched a child's room without the child's knowledge. At three months, the Ministry followed up with the home and confirmed implementation (e.g., reviewed memos and amended policies).

- The Ministry set a deadline of 1–3 months to complete some action plan items and 3–6 months for other items at one group home.

For example, the Ministry recommended the group home record all medical, dental, and optical appointments, diagnoses, and prescriptions in a child's file as the reviewer found two children did not have records despite residing in the home for over 60 days. At the time of our audit, the Ministry's deadline for implementation had not yet passed.

Not tracking the status of group homes' corrective action plans to respond to non-compliance concerns increases the risk that deficiencies go unaddressed. Identifying delays in implementing action plans would provide the Ministry with important information when determining whether it needs to provide additional support to a group home.

3. We recommend the Ministry of Social Services track the implementation status of corrective action plans to confirm group homes caring for children address non-compliance issues identified during detailed reviews.

4.9 Serious Incidents Tracked but Not Sufficiently Analyzed

The Ministry of Social Services tracks, but does not analyze, serious incidents reported at group homes caring for children.

The Ministry established a reporting system for group home operators to self-report any serious incidents. **Figure 10** sets out the types of incidents group homes must report immediately to a child's Ministry case worker.

Figure 10—Types of Serious Incidents Group Homes Must Report Immediately

- An illness, injury, condition, or event resulting in death
- Qualified physician determines child's death caused by serious incident
- Incidents necessitating major medical treatment of a child and may cause serious or long-term impairment as determined by a qualified medical practitioner
- An illness, injury, condition, or event requiring medical treatment including hospital admission and does not result in either the child's death or long-term impairment of the child's health
- Disclosure of physical or sexual abuse
- Victim of physical or sexual assault
- A child goes missing from a group home
- Allegations of abuse made against group home staff

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Social Services Residential Services Manual.

During the detailed reviews, we found the Ministry reviews serious incidents recorded by the group home for the previous 3–6 months to ensure the home managed them according to standards, including timely reporting to the Ministry.

The Ministry tracks serious incidents including information on the child in care (name, date of birth), date of incident, where it happened (e.g., at group home, while on a family visit, at school, in the community), where the child resides (e.g., group home, foster home), and description of the incident. It also differentiates serious incidents by the level of impact on the health and safety of the child. For example, medium-impact incidents include injury or condition needing medical treatment like surgery and high-impact incidents include serious injury requiring significant medical attention or a condition that results in a child's death.

We found the Ministry does not track its assessment of whether the care at a group home was a factor contributing to a serious incident. Doing so would help the Ministry select homes at higher risk of providing inappropriate care for detailed reviews (see **Recommendation 1** regarding the Ministry's use of a risk-based approach to select group homes for review).

Our analysis found group homes reported 149 serious incidents to the Ministry in 2025 with the top three incidents relating to health (76), mental health (36), and sexual assault (26). One death occurred in 2025. We reviewed the Ministry's summarized description of the incidents and found none implied the care at homes contributed to the serious incidents.

We tested five high-impact serious incidents and found the Ministry appropriately investigated each case and determined the care at the home did not contribute to the serious incident.



However, we found the Ministry does not consistently track the specific group home where a serious incident occurred. In some cases, it only tracks home operator names and not the specific home—often one group home operator operates more than one home in Saskatchewan. Thus, we were not only unable to identify if one specific home had more ongoing serious incidents, but also the Ministry does not know which specific homes have more serious incidents than others.

Comprehensively analyzing serious incidents at each group home would allow the Ministry to identify home operators who are no longer suitable to care for children (see **Recommendation 4**). It would also allow the Ministry to select homes for detailed program reviews that are at higher risk of providing poor care (see **Recommendation 1**).

4.10 Serious Complaints Investigated and Resolved Timely

The Ministry of Social Services assessed serious complaints (e.g., serious illness/injury, physical abuse, sexual abuse, deaths) received and determined the appropriate course of action (e.g., investigation). The Ministry completed timely investigations and ensured group homes had sufficient actions to address quality-of-care findings.

The Ministry's Residential Services Unit and Provincial Resource Assessment Team work together to investigate serious complaints (i.e., allegations) received against group homes.¹⁰ Serious complaints can be submitted by children in care, parents, group home operators, Ministry staff, or the public via a central email address that both the Residential Services Unit and Assessment Team monitor.

Once the Ministry receives a serious complaint, staff gather further information to determine how to handle the complaint such as by interviewing children, obtaining incident reports from the group home, and having discussions with group home operators.

The Ministry makes one of three decisions:

- **Screened out:** allegation does not meet the Ministry's mandate or no further action required (e.g., complaint does not meet mandate for investigation)
- **Investigation:** allegation received indicates concern of abuse or neglect that warrants investigating to determine child safety. The staff member involved in the allegation would be removed from group home, where warranted.
- **Quality-of-care finding:** actions or acts of omission by group home staff that indicates the group home did not operate in compliance with standards and had a negative impact on the care of the child but did not rise to the threshold of the child needing protection.¹¹

In 2025, the Ministry received 289 serious complaints (i.e., allegations) with 150 screened out, 54 investigated, and 100 quality-of-care findings.

¹⁰ The Provincial Resource Assessment Team is a dedicated provincial unit that seeks to enhance practices and support relationships with group home operators while responding to reported concerns regarding the care of children and youth. It is responsible for leading a consistent and timely approach in assessing reports of abuse and neglect in group homes.

¹¹ Adapted from Ministry of Social Services records.

When the Ministry determines a complaint warrants an investigation, it requires staff to investigate (e.g., conduct interviews, review reports from third parties such as police or medical experts) within 30 days of receiving the serious complaint and 90 days to finalize a report. Reports to group home operators outline the findings and a conclusion on whether the serious complaint was substantiated. Often investigations will have quality-of-care findings.

If the Ministry deems a serious complaint as a quality-of-care finding, it requires a quality-of-care concern report. Ministry staff interview children residing at the group home and group home operators prior to making a screening decision and completing the report. The report includes details of interviews, the quality-of-care issues, and which standards the home failed to follow. Issues with quality of care may include group home staff not completing daily checks for bruising or injuries on children. The Ministry gives a group home 15 days to document how it plans to address a quality-of-care issue.

We found the Ministry does not formally follow up with the group home to ensure it implemented certain planned actions (e.g., training sessions, staff meetings to review policies) for quality-of-care findings. The Ministry should analyze the quality-of-care issues to assess trends or common recurring concerns overall (see **Section 4.11**).

Our testing of 25 serious complaints found:

- 17 were screened out. The Ministry resolved all screened out serious complaints within four business days.
- Six warranted investigations. In all instances the Ministry consulted a third party (e.g., child's school, doctor, police). Staff completed the investigations within 30 days and reported the results within 90 days for five of the investigations. One investigation was still ongoing at the time of our audit and not due for reporting.

Four of the completed investigations resulted in quality-of-care findings. We found the homes completed action plans within the required 15 days in three instances. The Ministry approved an extension for the other group home, and the Ministry received the action plan within 25 days.

- Two resulted in quality-of-care recommendations. We found the homes completed the action plans within the required 15 days.

Investigating and resolving serious complaints timely is essential for safeguarding children in care and ensuring their safety and wellbeing.

4.11 Enhanced Analysis of Key Information for Group Homes Needed

The Ministry of Social Services analyzes some key information (e.g., space utilization) but more analysis is needed on serious incidents, serious complaints investigated, and detailed reviews at group homes. It reports statistics on serious incidents and serious complaints to senior management.



Space Utilization

Each year, the Ministry analyzes space utilization to verify no group home cares for more children than permitted. We found the Ministry identified no homes over capacity. In 2025–26 (up to October 2025), the Ministry had 930 spaces at group homes. It found an average space utilization of 84% across the whole province with the following breakdowns:

- 82% utilization rate in the north region
- 89% utilization rate in the central region
- 81% utilization rate in the south region

Management indicated some homes care for high-needs children (e.g., medically complex) making it challenging for those homes to be at full capacity.

Serious Incidents

The Ministry's Quality Assurance Unit tracks serious incidents and reports annually to senior management (or as serious injuries or deaths occur).

As high-impact serious incidents occur (i.e., death or serious injury requiring significant medical attention), we found the Ministry provides individual reports to senior management outlining what occurred and the outcome of its investigation. Four high-impact serious incidents occurred in 2023 (including one death), six in 2024, and three in 2025 (including one death) relating to children with a placement in group home care.¹²

Annually, the Quality Assurance Unit reports statistics on medium-impact serious incidents occurring across all types of housing resources (e.g., group homes, foster homes). The 2024 report noted 37% (148) of 400 incidents related to children who reside in group homes.¹³

As noted in **Section 4.9**, the Ministry should indicate in its tracking document whether the care at a home was a contributing factor to a serious incident. It should also consistently track the specific home where the child resides. Without this information, the Ministry is limited in its ability to sufficiently analyze incidents occurring at specific group homes and take action, if necessary.

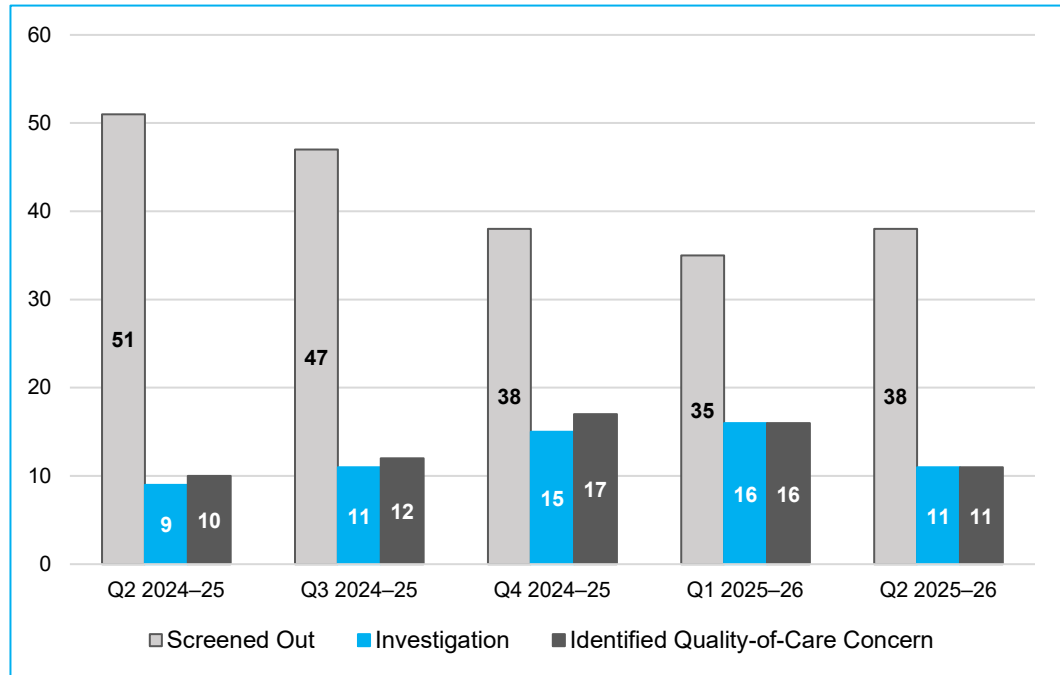
Serious Complaints (i.e., allegations)

In June 2024, the Ministry's Provincial Resource Assessment Team began tracking all serious complaints received as well as began reporting quarterly to senior management. **Figure 11** outlines the number of serious complaints at group homes received over the last year and how many of those complaints the Ministry screened out, investigated, or identified a quality-of-care concern.

¹² Adapted from Ministry of Social Services records.

¹³ At the time of our audit (i.e., November 30, 2025), the 2025 report was not available.

Figure 11—Number and Types of Ministry of Social Services Actions on Serious Complaints at Group Homes Caring for Children from September 2024 to September 2025



Source: Adapted from Ministry of Social Services records.

Management indicated it does not have sufficient data to perform any type of trend analysis (e.g., year-over-year, type of serious complaint)—it plans to do so once sufficient information is available. During our testing of serious complaints that resulted in quality-of-care findings, we found two reports tested identified concerns of inappropriate use of physical intervention by group home staff.

Detailed Reviews

As noted in **Section 4.6**, after completing detailed reviews, staff prepare a report on the results of each review. The Ministry has not established a method to monitor and analyze overall detailed review results. Without analyzing results, the Ministry cannot determine trends (e.g., common non-compliance concerns) from its detailed reviews, which limits its ability to provide additional guidance or support to all group homes when similar concerns arise.

For example, we found a common theme in our testing of three detailed reviews—in two reviews, staff at group homes were not fully aware of the reporting procedures for allegations made against a group home staff member.

By not analyzing trends on key data related to group homes, it increases the risk of the Ministry not making necessary changes to processes, educating group homes on areas of concern, or adjusting legislation to address incidents or deficiencies occurring in group homes caring for children. Analyzing key information on homes would also assist the Ministry in selecting higher risk homes for detailed reviews (see **Recommendation 1**).



4. We recommend the Ministry of Social Services analyze key information (e.g., serious incidents, serious complaints investigated, deficiencies identified during detailed reviews) related to group homes caring for children.

4.12 Central Tracking of Monitoring Results Needed

The Ministry of Social Services does not centrally track all findings related to individual group homes caring for children.

We found different units within the Ministry track information related to group homes in different databases. For example:

- The Community Service Development Unit tracks licences issued and those group homes with conditional licences
- The Residential Services Unit tracks detailed reviews
- The Quality Assurance Unit tracks and reports on serious incidents
- The Provincial Resource Assessment Team tracks and reports on serious complaints (i.e., allegations)

Without centrally tracking information on each group home in one location, the Ministry is unable to effectively monitor and analyze homes to identify and examine trends on what happens in a particular home. There is also a risk that areas of concern are not identified, compiled, and mitigated appropriately. Centrally tracking key information on group homes would further assist the Ministry in selecting higher risk homes for detailed program reviews (see **Recommendation 1**).

5. We recommend the Ministry of Social Services centrally track key information (e.g., licensing, detailed reviews, serious incidents, serious complaints) related to group homes caring for children.

5.0 SELECTED REFERENCES

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