

Chapter 24

Social Services—Monitoring Foster Families

1.0 MAIN POINTS

At December 2025, the Ministry had 448 foster families approved to provide care. There were 954 children requiring protection and out-of-home care living with foster families.

By February 2026, the Ministry of Social Services strengthened its monitoring of whether foster families provide a safe and secure environment for children in care by implementing the remaining three recommendations we first made in 2020.

The Ministry is completing required background checks on all adults in a foster home prior to approving new foster families. We found the Ministry consistently checked its records to identify whether foster care applicants had previous involvement with the Ministry (e.g., documented history of child abuse or neglect) and it obtained criminal record/vulnerable sector checks from the seven new foster families we tested.

Additionally, the Ministry now obtains criminal record/vulnerable sector checks periodically (i.e., every three years) for all adults residing in approved foster homes. We found the Ministry obtained these checks within the last three years for 25 foster families tested; the one foster family that did not have updated criminal record/vulnerable sector checks had not fostered children since 2024 and closed as a foster home in 2026.

The Ministry improved its timely completion of annual review reports of foster families. As of February 2026, the Ministry completed review reports during 2025 for 91% of foster families we tested. We found the Ministry could not locate completed reports for two foster families; however, notes in the Ministry's case-management IT system indicated the 2025 reviews occurred. The Ministry uses annual reviews to identify and offer foster families timely support and training to provide quality care for children at foster homes.

Effectively monitoring the safety of children in care and providing needed support to foster families is crucial to nurturing these children's health and wellbeing.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

The Ministry of Social Services is responsible for children when they require protection and out-of-home care. *The Child and Family Services Act* requires the Minister of Social Services to investigate if reasonable grounds exist to believe a child needs protection due to physical, sexual or emotional abuse, or neglect. Children come into care under the authority of the Act either through voluntary agreement between the Ministry and biological parents, or by a court order.¹ The Ministry may place children in out-of-home care with

¹ Saskatchewan Foster Families Association, *A Guide for Caregivers: Third Edition Handbook*, 2021, p. 7.



extended family networks or within the child’s cultural community, residential group homes, or foster homes.

At December 31, 2025, 954 children were living in foster homes. Of 448 foster homes approved by the Ministry, 83 homes did not have children in care at that time.² There is an increasing number of children living in foster homes—at November 2023, 912 children were living in foster homes.

In 2024–25, the Ministry provided \$34.2 million in support to foster families (e.g., monthly payment for basic expenses, special needs care).³

A foster family is responsible for providing foster children with safe, healthy, and nurturing relationships, and a family environment with the goal to provide opportunities for healing, growth, development, and support of the children so they may be reunited with their biological family.⁴

The Ministry must ensure children placed in foster homes are well cared for and safe, and foster families receive ongoing support to provide quality care.

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our third follow-up audit of the Ministry’s actions on the recommendations we first made in 2020.

We concluded, for the 12-month period ended December 31, 2019, the Ministry of Social Services had effective processes to monitor whether foster families provide a safe and secure environment for children in care, except in the areas of our six recommendations.⁵ By January 2024, the Ministry implemented three recommendations.⁶

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry’s progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. Ministry management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To carry out our follow-up audit, we interviewed key Ministry staff, examined policies and procedures, and assessed background checks and annual review reports related to monitoring foster families. We also tested a sample of foster families’ files.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at February 28, 2026, and the Ministry of Social Services’ actions up to that date.

² Information provided by the Ministry of Social Services.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Saskatchewan Foster Families Association, *A Guide for Caregivers: Third Edition Handbook*, 2021, p. 6.

⁵ *2020 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 12*, pp. 155–173.

⁶ *2022 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 26*, pp. 249–255 and *2024 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 21*, pp. 221–226.

3.1 Required Background Checks Completed Prior to Approving New Foster Families

We recommended the Ministry of Social Services complete all required background checks prior to approving foster families. (2020 Report – Volume 1, p. 160, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement March 2, 2022)

Status—Implemented

The Ministry of Social Services completes required background checks prior to approving new foster families.

Before approving applicants to become foster care providers, we found the Ministry continues to require staff to complete two background checks. If any criminal charges or history concerns arise, the Ministry may deny the foster application. Staff are responsible for:

- Requesting a criminal record and vulnerable sector check for each applicant and any other adult 18 years of age or older, including adult children, living in the home⁷
- Conducting a record check in the Ministry's case-management IT system to identify any previous involvement with the Ministry (e.g., history of child abuse or neglect).

The Ministry approved 63 new foster families between April 1, 2024 and December 31, 2025.

We tested files for seven new foster families and found the Ministry completed the required background checks for all seven new foster families before approving their applications.

Completing all required background record checks for foster care applicants and all adult residents in a potential foster home prior to approval reduces potential threats to a child's safety when placed in a foster home.

3.2 Periodic Criminal Record Checks Completed

We recommended the Ministry of Social Services require periodic criminal record checks on all adults residing in approved foster homes. (2020 Report – Volume 1, p. 164, Recommendation 4; Public Accounts Committee agreement March 2, 2022)

Status—Implemented

The Ministry of Social Services strengthened its process to periodically obtain updated criminal record checks, including vulnerable sector checks, for all adults residing in approved foster homes.

We found the Ministry developed a monitoring system (i.e., central tracking sheet) to track and monitor key information on foster families including periodic criminal record/vulnerable sector checks of all adults in approved foster homes.

⁷ A vulnerable sector check is a police information check plus a check to see if a person has a record suspension (pardon) for sexual offences. rcmp.ca/en/criminal-records/criminal-record-checks/vulnerable-sector-checks (26 February 2026).



We tested 26 foster family files and found the Ministry obtained criminal record/vulnerable sector checks within the last three years for 25 foster families tested. One foster family who did not have these checks updated had not fostered children since 2024, and closed as a foster home in 2026.

Requiring periodic criminal record and vulnerable sector checks decreases the risk of children in foster homes residing in unsafe environments. It also increases public confidence in the Ministry's ability to provide safe environments for children in its care.

3.3 Annual Review Reports Completed More Timely

We recommended the Ministry of Social Services consistently follow its standard to complete annual review reports of individual foster families.

(2020 Report – Volume 1, p. 165, Recommendation 5; Public Accounts Committee agreement March 2, 2022)

Status—Implemented

The Ministry of Social Services strengthened its completion of annual foster family review reports.

The Ministry requires its resource workers to complete an annual review of each foster family to evaluate whether the family still meets Ministry requirements for fostering children.⁸ As part of the review, resource workers assess the foster family's strengths, skills, and/or supports needed according to five competencies: protecting and nurturing children, meeting children's developmental needs, supporting family relationships, connecting children to nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime, and working as a member of a professional team.⁹

The Ministry requires resource workers to complete and sign a report once they finish their annual review assessment, collect all documentation (e.g., home safety check), and meet with each foster family about the review's results.

We tested 26 foster family files and found that during the 2025 calendar year the Ministry:

- Completed an annual review report for 20 foster families
- Could not locate a signed annual review report for two foster families in their case files; however, the Ministry's case-management IT system contained notes from resource workers indicating completion of reviews for these two foster families during 2025.
- Did not complete a review of four foster families, as they were not actively fostering children throughout the previous year.

Conducting annual foster family reviews allows the Ministry to take timely and appropriate action when a foster family needs additional support or is no longer suitable for fostering children.

⁸ Annual reviews are completed within a calendar year.

⁹ These are the five core competencies of the Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE) model of practice for the development and support of foster and adoptive families.