

FCSS



Context and overview for research briefs

FCSS research briefs

FCSS Calgary has adopted a social sustainability framework to serve as a blueprint for its social planning, investment decisions, and funding practices. Within this framework, FCSS has identified two investment priorities: strengthening neighbourhoods and increasing social inclusion.

This research brief is one of six originally commissioned by FCSS in 2009 and updated in 2014 to include advances in research. The information in the briefs was gathered through:

- A search of large academic search engines (including PubMed, CINAHL, Cochrane Library, Campbell Library, JSTOR, PsycINFO, SSRN and Google Scholar) for articles published since 2009 on the key topic areas and since 2001 on disability-related program research.
- A review of published research citing the most important publications included in the 2009 editions of the briefs to identify any updates or changes to content of the earlier research briefs.
- A search of the best and promising practice websites and databases for updates since 2009.

- A review of articles and websites submitted by FCSS funded agencies.

The research briefs are not intended to serve as program development toolkits. The purpose of the briefs is to provide guidance from the research, where it exists, to funders and organizations working to influence the following long term outcomes.

Increasing social inclusion among vulnerable Calgarians by:

- Increasing positive social ties.
- Improving family functioning or parenting skills.
- Improving adults' personal capacity and individual and family economic self-sufficiency.
- Improving positive child and youth development outcomes.

Strengthening focus neighbourhoods to help increase community capacity and social and individual capital and to help foster a decrease or at least no increase in spatial concentrations of poverty in Calgary by:

- Increasing neighbourhood cohesion and social capital.
- Increasing and improving accessible and quality programs, services, amenities and infrastructure.
- Improving the natural and built environment.
- Increasing economic well-being.

“Vulnerable Calgarians” are populations that are most at risk of social exclusion: immigrants, Aboriginal peoples, families, children and youth, and seniors meeting specified criteria:

Vulnerable immigrants	Have arrived in the last five years, are refugees, face language/cultural barriers, have low income/unable to obtain employment commensurate with credentials, are stay-at-home parents or seniors, belong to ethno-cultural communities with few members in Calgary.
Vulnerable Aboriginal peoples	Individuals and communities that have been affected by the multigenerational impacts of colonialism, such as the effects of residential schools. These effects may include systemic racism and discrimination, resulting in chronic low income, high mobility, loss of culture, and other negative social indicators. Aboriginal peoples include First Nations (status, non-status and Bill C-31 individuals), Métis, and Inuit people. As directed by the FCSS Act, Aboriginal programming must be located within City of Calgary (CMA) boundaries.
Vulnerable families	Experience chronic low-income, teen parents, lone parent + low income, few social supports, high household mobility, homelessness, parents with low personal capacity, family dysfunction, experience/have experienced or witness/have witnessed abuse.
Vulnerable children and youth	Live alone or are homeless, live in families experiencing chronic low-income, live in dysfunctional families, experience or have experienced or witness or have witnessed abuse and/or trauma, lack interpersonal and social skills, have cognitive deficits and/or emotional or mental health issues, are not engaged in or succeeding at school, experience low sense of belonging in school or community.
Vulnerable seniors	Are 65+, live alone (key risk factor for social isolation, along with 75+), have low income, are single and/or bereaved, are in poor health, experience language/cultural barriers, have transportation difficulties.

Context and overview for research briefs

It is acknowledged that disability is an attribute that increases people's vulnerability. For FCSS's purposes, "people with disabilities" are people with long-term physical or intellectual impairments that hinder their full participation in society.

In keeping with FCSS's prevention mandate, the focus of the briefs is on effective prevention programming. That is programming that directly prevents the onset or development of a problem, intervenes at a very early stage in its development, or works to prevent or mitigate risk factors. It may also increase or strengthen protective factors that prevent a problem from occurring or escalating.

A risk factor increases the likelihood of a behaviour or condition that usually has negative consequences. A protective factor moderates or reduces the impact of a risk factor. Risk and protective factors can exist in the individual, family, peer, school, and community contexts. Risk factors may be due to a constellation of underlying problems including, but not limited to: family dysfunction, abuse, cognitive or learning challenges, and emotional or mental health challenges.

It is strongly recognized that many social, economic and other problems experienced by groups and individuals of all ages are caused, or exacerbated by, inequality and discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex,

gender, sexual orientation, marital status, family status and/or disability. However, it is beyond the scope of the briefs to provide a comprehensive review of the myriad ways in which inequality and discrimination play roles in the genesis and development of such problems.

Each research brief provides an overview of the issue we seek to prevent, and the best ways of preventing it as identified by research, with several caveats:

- In the briefs, it would be impossible to provide an overview of every possible prevention initiative for every target group and each dimension of every issue. Rather, the briefs focus on the most prevalent and widely-researched issues and interventions, with a strong focus on interventions that prevent the onset of problems. Some briefs include a quick mention of interventions or programming outside of FCSS's funding mandate or, possibly, within its mandate but not currently funded. This information has been included to provide readers with a fuller picture of the ways particular issues or problems can be prevented, as it may be useful to them in framing or making the case for their own services, shaping their FCSS-funded programs, developing programs supported by other funders, or developing policy initiatives.
- It is widely recognized most of the social, economic, and other problems experienced by individuals of all ages are best

prevented early in life. This is not to say that prevention initiatives should only target children and families, but it does mean there is a much richer body of research on evidence-based programs for children and families than for any other group across the lifespan. This is reflected in the content of the research briefs.

- In some areas, we simply don't know what works. If a particular type of programming or intervention is not included in the briefs, it does not necessarily mean that it is ineffective; it may simply mean it has yet to be rigorously evaluated. In addition, in some areas it has been possible to identify both evidence-based programs and evidence-based practices. In other areas, there is no solid research to guide programming efforts, and it would be folly to include speculative promising practices that might soon be demonstrated to be ineffective or even harmful.
- Due to the overwhelming volume of research published on programming for people with disabilities, wherever possible the briefs draw on information provided in research summaries, reviews of literature, and research meta-analyses.
- Programming and interventions for Aboriginal people are not included in the five briefs. Rather, they are addressed in a stand-alone Aboriginal brief.