

# **BC Family Maintenance Agency**

## **2021/22 – 2023/24 Service Plan**

**April 2021**



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## Board Chair's Accountability Statement



The 2021/22 – 2023/24 BC Family Maintenance Agency Service Plan was prepared under the Board's direction in accordance with the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*. The plan is consistent with government's strategic priorities and fiscal plan. The Board is accountable for the contents of the plan, including what has been included in the plan and how it has been reported. The Board is responsible for the validity and reliability of the information included in the plan.

All significant assumptions, policy decisions, events and identified risks, as of April 2021 have been considered in preparing the plan. The performance measures presented are consistent with the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*, the BC Family Maintenance Agency mandate and goals, and focus on aspects critical to the organization's performance. The targets in this plan have been determined based on an assessment of the BC Family Maintenance Agency's operating environment, forecast conditions, risk assessment and past performance.

Richard J.M Fyfe, QC

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'R. J. M. Fyfe', written in a cursive style.

Board Chair

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## Strategic Direction and Alignment with Government Priorities

In 2021/22, British Columbians continue to face significant challenges as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Recovering from the pandemic will require focused direction, strong alignment and ongoing engagement between public sector organizations and the Government of British Columbia. The government has identified five foundational principles that will inform each Crown agency's policies and programs and contribute to COVID recovery: putting people first, lasting and meaningful reconciliation, equity and anti-racism, a better future through fighting climate change and meeting our greenhouse gas commitments, and a strong, sustainable economy that works for everyone.

The BC Family Maintenance Agency (BCFMA) is a recently established Crown agency mandated to provide family justice services to families. The BCFMA is responsible for the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP), which is delivered under the [Family Maintenance Enforcement Act](#) (FMEA). The *FMEA* provides the authority for the Agency to monitor, facilitate and enforce maintenance orders and agreements, ensuring that families receive the financial support that they are entitled to under provincial and federal law.

Establishing the BCFMA was the first step in a longer-term transformation of how family maintenance services are delivered in British Columbia. Globally, family maintenance services have evolved away from focusing on pure enforcement to be more supportive, cooperative, and collaborative. These approaches have been proven to be of more benefit to both parents and children.

Since transitioning to a Crown agency, the BCFMA has focused on stabilizing the organization, assessing current services, and most recently and critically responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. To evolve our services and plan for the future, the BCFMA has developed a new strategic framework to focus the organization over the next three years (through to 2024). The backbone of this new strategic framework is the creation of new, more holistic Vision and Mission statements:

- New BCFMA Vision Statement: *Healthy and thriving children who contribute to a strong and resilient future for all British Columbians*
- New BCFMA Mission Statement: *British Columbians who experience separation or divorce are supported in achieving and maintaining the best financial outcomes for their family*

Where possible, modern family maintenance services embrace outcomes that are more inclusive of collective family well-being. Aspects of this strategic shift are now being implemented to better support families undergoing separation or divorce. For the BCFMA, meeting the goals of the new strategy includes:

- Ensuring services are client centric, so that financial supports are aligned with family needs and delivered in ways clients wish to receive them
- Ensuring customers experience services that are proactive and inclusive, enabling early engagement and tailored approaches

- Educating and supporting customers to advocate for themselves and, where appropriate and necessary, to seek assistance and support
- Connecting customers with other service providers to enhance services, be collaborative, and ensure integration with other social programs
- Providing continuously effective and innovative family justice and maintenance services, while pursuing efficiencies, that meet the needs of families

The Attorney General communicated his expectations of, as well as the key 2021/22 priorities for, the BCFMA in the [2021/22 BCFMA Mandate Letter](#). The COVID-19 pandemic has specifically highlighted the need for interdependence of government services used by BCFMA customers. By re-focusing BCFMA resources and strategic direction on service interdependence and connections, client experience, education, innovation and a more holistic approach, families impacted by separation or divorce will benefit.

## Operating Environment

The FMEP, a free public service, has been one of Canada's most successful support enforcement services over the past 32 years. Despite the impacts of COVID-19, the program continues to meet its desired outcomes as reflected by achieving the highest per-case rate of support payments received ever recorded in its history.

FMEP operations include receiving support payments from the person required to pay maintenance (the payor) and disbursing that money to the person entitled to maintenance (the recipient). Many payors make their payments voluntarily, however the program often has to take administrative enforcement measures and/or return matters to the courts. Most of the families in receipt of support are of low or modest incomes, and the monthly amounts received provide an important and growing amount of their disposable income. Since inception, over \$4.5 Billion in child and spousal support payments have been disbursed through the program. Despite the impacts of COVID-19 during 2020/21, a conservative estimate of over \$210 Million is forecasted to be disbursed to about 35,000 families within BC, across Canada, and to families living in countries that have service agreements with BC.

COVID-19 has greatly impacted operations and it is expected that the 2021/22 program year will continue to be affected. When the pandemic began there was an immediate and measurable impact on support payments as many payors went from employment to being on income support sources (including Employment Insurance and other Federal Government benefits). As a greater reliance was placed on funds intercepted each month from the Federal Government, the orientation of payments for many cases changed from direct payments by the payor to enforcement actions taken (to ensure that some funds were recovered from income support sources). This change impacted almost 7,000 cases, or 20 per cent of the BCFMA's total caseload. The same or a similar number of cases are anticipated to be affected through 2021/22 as the impacts of COVID-19 continue.

The BCFMA's strategic challenges and opportunities for 2021/22 include program delivery, partner outreach, and improving the client experience. BCFMA staff have transitioned from working full-time in office environments to the majority of employees now integrated into work-from-home arrangements. The Agency will look to build on this flexible work structure by continuing to enable staff to deliver the program effectively both while working from the office and when working remotely. Information technology systems will be updated, and staff provided with the supports (e.g. proper equipment, training and development) they need to be successful.

The BCFMA program remains one of BC's strongest responses to combat child poverty, and disbursements directly support the economies of BC's communities. For many families, the recovery of income support allows children and young adults to continue their education past secondary school, thereby providing greater opportunities for success and to become a part of building a stronger BC economy overall. Working with industry partners, the Agency will explore marketing strategies and outreach methods (such as working with/through schools and community groups) in order to communicate with clients who may not be aware of the BCFMA's services.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduced economic activity in BC in 2020. The ongoing evolution and economic cost of the pandemic on BC and its trading partners remains highly uncertain. The Economic Forecast Council (EFC) estimates a 5.1 per cent decline in BC real GDP in 2020 and expects growth of 4.9 per cent in 2021 and 4.3 per cent in 2022. Meanwhile for Canada, the EFC projects national real GDP growth of 4.7 per cent in 2021 and 4.2 per cent in 2022, following an estimated decline of 5.4 per cent in 2020. As such, BC's economic growth is expected to outperform Canada's in the coming years. The pandemic has increased risks to BC's economic outlook, such as the timing of the global vaccination rollout, extended travel restrictions, a weaker global recovery, and the continued impact of a slower recovery in some sectors of the BC economy. Further risks include ongoing uncertainty regarding global trade policies and lower commodity prices.



## Performance Planning

### Goal 1: Provide effective and efficient enforcement services for British Columbians

The BCFMA will continue to provide a high level of service to clients. The Agency will ensure service levels are maintained and/or enhanced during BC’s response to COVID-19.

### Objective 1.1: Maintenance orders and agreements filed under the *Family Maintenance Enforcement Act* are enforced and payments are recovered

#### Key Strategies

- Continue to work with payors and recipients to ensure the terms of maintenance orders are fulfilled
- Continue to work with payors to facilitate payment to an enrolled recipient, and to collect outstanding debts or fees
- Continue to work with the courts to enforce maintenance orders and agreements

Performance Measure(s)	2012/13 Baseline	2020/21 Forecast	2021/22 Target	2022/23 Target	2023/24 Target
1.1a Child and family support payments recovered per case through the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program <sup>1</sup>	\$5,053	\$6,294	\$6,300	\$6,400	\$6,500
1.1b Telephone call response time – in minutes:seconds (industry standard is less than three minutes) <sup>1</sup>	1:00	2:00+	2:30	2:30	2:30
1.1c Web message response time – in days (internal standard for the program is less than two business days) <sup>2</sup>	0.75	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

<sup>1</sup> Data Source: FMEP Key Indicators Report.

<sup>2</sup> Data Source: FMEP Key Indicators Report. 1.0 = one business day.

#### Linking Performance Measure to Objective

1.1a This performance measure assesses the impact of effective case management and administrative enforcement by measuring the recovery of financial support for families. An annual increase in the number of support payments recovered per case (or family) means that the BCFMA is providing its services effectively and efficiently.

1.1b This performance measure reflects timely and efficient telephone communications between program staff, clients, and stakeholders. Keeping the time required to reply to telephone messages below established standards will demonstrate that the BCFMA is providing efficient service.

1.1c This performance measure reflects timely and efficient web message communications between program staff, clients, and stakeholders. Keeping the time required to reply to web

messages below established standards will demonstrate that the BCFMA is providing efficient service.

## **Discussion**

As described in the Operating Environment section, an outcome of the pandemic has been an increase in the amount of Federal Government income supports collected, as some payors who were not making regular support payments have suddenly become visible as funds are captured. These gains are expected to continue, and with the continuous improvement of the delivery of the FMEP's performance framework (concentrated on recovery of payments, speed of disbursement of payments, and timely communications that protect the health and safety of payors, recipients, and children), target values for support payments recovered per case are expected to increase by one per cent each year from the 2020/21 forecast.

BCFMA communications staff are cross-trained to address both telephone calls and web enquiries. The average telephone call response time has risen from the baseline (of one minute), and is forecast to be just over two minutes during 2020/21, which is below the three-minute industry standard. Technology and call structure changes, that permits queued calls to be responded to by all staff who work remotely (not just by those working in the office that received the call), will continue. However, overall telephone response times are expected to increase year over year due to case complexity, recruitment lag, and staff being deployed to other business areas.

Web message response times were previously reported in hours but will now be reported in days. The volume of web messages received makes the FMEP website one of the most active in the BC public services with over 1.5 million contacts each year. The forecasted 2020/21 average web message response time increased to two days from its previous target of just over one day due to the increased complexity of cases and growing message volume that resulted from COVID-19. With business process changes and a decrease in the number of web messages received (with a reduction in the number of total client cases) it is expected that web message response times will return to one business day for 2021/22.

**Goal 2: Ensure BCFMA’s services support the needs of individuals and families**

Work collaboratively with service delivery partners, including the Ministry of Attorney General, affected ministries, and relevant stakeholders, to determine opportunities to better meet the needs of low-income individuals and families for support and enforcement.

**Objective 2.1: Raise awareness of BCFMA mandate and strengthen relationships with FMEP participants and stakeholders**

**Key Strategies**

- Strengthen relationships with key stakeholders and government partners
- Update the BCFMA multi-year strategic plan that includes a performance framework
- Contribute to the Ministry of Attorney General’s goal that the justice and public safety sector in British Columbia is sustainable

Performance Measure(s)	2020/21 Forecast	2021/22 Target	2022/23 Target	2023/24 Target
2.1a Agency completes/updates its multi-year strategic plan <sup>1</sup>	100%	100%	100%	100%
2.1b Increase the number of recipients on income assistance enrolled in FMEP <sup>2</sup>	5%	6%	7%	8%

<sup>1</sup>Data source: BCFMA

<sup>2</sup>Data source: BCFMA

**Linking Performance Measure to Objective**

2.1a The first multi-year strategic plan was produced during 2020/21 with guidance from the BCFMA Board of Directors. The strategic plan demonstrates how the BCFMA intends to work with its partners to deliver seamless and integrated services, to ensure its employees are trained, engaged and empowered, and to provide effective and innovative family justice and maintenance services to meet the needs of families. This performance measure, including the year-over-year target to update the multi-year strategic plan, assesses the Agency’s commitment towards developing an overall strategic framework for the long-term sustainability of the BCFMA service delivery model.

2.1b Supporting those clients on income assistance towards obtaining support measures the BCFMA’s ability to work with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction to better serve our common clients. An increase in clients on income assistance obtaining support means that those families fully benefit from Government’s policy decisions and better outcomes are being achieved for children living in BC’s poorest households.

**Discussion**

The BCFMA strives to meet the needs of low-income individuals and families for support and enforcement. The multi-year strategic plan, including the performance framework, will allow

the organization to measure, be accountable for, and ensure sustainability of the BCFMA service's delivery model.

The increase in the number of recipients on income assistance enrolled in FMEP performance measure is new for 2021/22. The measure will assess the BCFMA's ability to directly assist those clients who also receive income assistance. The measure also aligns the BCFMA to the [TogetherBC – British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy](#), and government's commitment to reduce overall poverty in BC by 25 per cent, and child poverty in BC by 50 per cent, by 2024.

**Goal 3: Develop and maintain a responsive and resilient organization**

Establish a governance framework to deliver the mandate of the BCFMA while reviewing opportunities to maintain a healthy workplace environment, in consultation with the Minister of Attorney General.

**Objective 3.1: Provide a workplace that promotes employee engagement and satisfaction**

**Key Strategies**

- Promote strong teamwork and open communication amongst all staff members, and provide significant learning opportunities
- Develop a measure and method for employee engagement
- Review roles and responsibilities and, where required, update and implement a new organizational structure

Performance Measure(s)	2020/21 Forecast	2021/22 Target	2022/23 Target	2023/24 Target
3.1a An employee engagement survey has been completed <sup>1</sup>	50%	100%	n/a	100%

<sup>1</sup>Data Source: BCFMA

**Linking Performance Measure to Objective**

3.1a The BCFMA believes that providing employees with a healthy work environment improves staff well-being and encourages employees to contribute to organizational success. Initiating an employee engagement survey establishes a baseline and helps to identify new strategies that could be implemented in order to support continuous improvement.

**Discussion**

The BCFMA is committed towards improving staff satisfaction, recruitment and retention, and towards developing and maintaining employee skills, while maximizing productivity and efficiency. Future workplace environment performance measures will be developed using the baseline data established through this survey.

Given the timing and impacts of COVID-19, collective bargaining with the BCFMA’s two unions, and the process to hire a new Chief Executive Officer, the BCFMA did not fully implement an employee engagement survey during fiscal 2020/21 (as was previously targeted). With the organization looking to establish a benchmark for future studies, it is anticipated that the survey instrument will be fully developed and ready for execution by the end of fiscal 2020/21. The survey will then be conducted and the results analyzed and presented during early 2021/22. Furthermore, the target for 2022/23 is set to “N/A” to reflect that the employee engagement survey process is intended to be conducted every second year.

**Objective 3.2: Provide employees with the skills and training development opportunities needed to perform their jobs effectively**

**Key Strategies**

- Raise awareness among and equip staff with the skills and knowledge they require to be safe and successful in the workplace
- Document and fund a long-term employee skills and training development plan

Performance Measure(s)	2020/21 Forecast	2021/22 Target	2022/23 Target	2023/24 Target
3.1.b Implement a staff skills and training development program that includes two mental health training opportunities each year <sup>1</sup>	50%	100%	100%	100%

<sup>1</sup>Data Source: BCFMA

**Linking Performance Measure to Objective**

3.1a Providing employees with the skills and resources they need to be successful in the workplace will contribute to organizational success. Planning and implementing a staff skills and training development program tailored to the BCFMA’s unique needs is essential towards improving staff engagement, satisfaction, and retention.

**Discussion**

This Objective and Performance Measure is new for 2021/22. Family maintenance services are dedicated towards ensuring children and families receive the child and spousal support that they are entitled to. The business activities required of BCFMA staff to provide optimum maintenance enforcement creates the need for staff to maintain a unique combination of skills and knowledge. The BCFMA has historically provided a blend of training opportunities, however, the complexity of cases has increased the need for additional training to achieve the objectives of the Agency and the broader objectives of Government. The BCFMA requires a skills and training development program that addresses the correct opportunities for staff within a reasonable and sustainable budget.

The intention of this performance measure is as a placeholder for the development of a long-term skills and training development program for the organization. Future performance measures for this Goal/Objective are expected to specifically measure employee skills and training development.

## Financial Plan

The BCFMA continues to work to address the impacts of COVID-19 on operations. The Agency will continue to selectively invest in end-user computing hardware and enterprise infrastructure that facilitates off-site working for staff. Salaries and benefits are the Agency's primary drivers of expenses and compensation rates are now set through 2021/22. The BCFMA will continue to manage vacancies prudently, and benefits from a flexible and engaged workforce. The primary increase in forecast costs for the Agency are wage costs, which were negotiated in accordance with the collective bargaining mandate for all public sector agencies. Minor increases are budgeted for travel and office expenses as Province-wide restrictions lessen with the pandemic vaccine roll-out.

## Financial Summary

(\$m)	2020/21 Forecast	2021/22 Budget	2022/23 Plan	2023/24 Plan
<b>Total Revenue</b>				
Provincial Transfers <sup>1</sup>	18.820	19.140	19.140	19.140
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>18.820</b>	<b>19.140</b>	<b>19.140</b>	<b>19.140</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>				
Salaries & benefits	14.718	15.494	15.806	15.806
Travel	0.024	0.100	0.100	0.100
Contracts	0.345	0.225	0.131	0.131
Information technology	0.706	0.675	0.675	0.675
Office expenses & equipment	0.376	0.593	0.593	0.593
Facilities	2.035	1.645	1.645	1.645
Miscellaneous	0.616	0.408	0.190	0.190
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>18.820</b>	<b>19.140</b>	<b>19.140</b>	<b>19.140</b>
<b>Annual Surplus (Deficit)<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total Debt</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Accumulated Surplus (Deficit)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>	<b>0.050</b>	<b>0.200</b>	<b>0.259</b>	<b>0</b>

Note: The above financial information was prepared based on current Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.

## **Key Forecast Assumptions, Risks and Sensitivities**

### **Contributions from the Province**

The Provincial Government provides the annual base operating budget to the BCFMA through transfers made under the Operations Vote in the Ministry of Attorney General. The FMEP is dependent on this funding to provide services to the public.

### **Costing Assumptions**

The projected budget numbers in the Summary Financial Outlook table are based on the current-year forecast, and known contractual wage increases. As such, there is a risk of budget pressures from increasing external costs over which the program has limited or no control.

Mitigation strategies to manage these risks include frequent and detailed forecast reporting to the Ministry of Attorney General and central agencies to monitor and assess options, and active cost containment within the BCFMA.

### **Resource Planning**

The BCFMA is managing challenges related to succession planning and ongoing changes in the labour market. A stable and engaged staff complement are essential to continuity of service to Agency clients.

## **Management's Perspective on the Financial Outlook**

The impact of COVID-19 is the greatest risk to the financial plan and we do not know the long-term implications that it will have. The full impact of COVID will not be known until well into the 2021/22 fiscal year.



## Appendix A: Additional Information

### Corporate Governance

The [BC Family Maintenance Agency](https://www.bcfma.ca/) (BCFMA) works directly with the Government of BC to support the goals of increasing access to justice, reducing child poverty and delivering services to citizens in a customer-focused way. Reporting to the Ministry of Attorney General, the BCFMA has built and continues to build a foundation for services that are predictable, sustainable and able to change and expand as required.

Board of Directors: <https://www.bcfma.ca/about-us/board-of-directors/>

Statutes and Regulations: <https://www.bcfma.ca/about-us/statutes-and-regulations/>

Corporate Reporting: <https://www.bcfma.ca/about-us/reporting/>

### Organizational Overview

The BCFMA operates the [BC Family Maintenance Enforcement Program](https://www.bcfma.ca/) (FMEP) and is mandated to provide family justice services to families. The FMEP is delivered under the [Family Maintenance Enforcement Act](https://www.bcfma.ca/) (FEMA). The FEMA provides the authority to monitor and enforce maintenance orders and agreements, ensuring that families receive the financial support that they are entitled to under provincial and federal law.

The BCFMA's vision is to ensure healthy and thriving families achieve their full potential and secure the best possible future for their children. The BCFMA's mission is to ensure British Columbians who experience separation or divorce are supported in achieving and maintaining the best financial outcomes for their family.

Home Page: <https://www.bcfma.ca/>

About Us: <https://www.bcfma.ca/about-us/>

Family Maintenance Enforcement Program: <https://www.fmep.gov.bc.ca/about-the-program/>