

**MENTAL WELLNESS WEEK AND THE INTEGRATION  
OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

Mr. Speaker, this year we recognized NWT Mental Wellness Week from February 6 to 12, 2011 with the theme Mental Health for Everyone. It is an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of maintaining good mental health and to work towards reducing the stigma of mental illness.

The NWT celebrates Mental Wellness Week several months earlier than the rest of Canada. We can all appreciate that during the cold dark days of February, good Mental Health should be on all our minds.

Mr. Speaker, in Canada, one in five people will experience a mental health issue such as bipolar disorder, depression, psychosis or schizophrenia at some point in their lifetime. More than 70% of adults living with a mental illness say the onset developed before age 18. Mental illness is a health issue that we cannot ignore.

Mental illness affects people of all ages and from all walks of life. Most individuals find ways to live with their illnesses but how they are treated by others often proves to be more of a challenge than the illness itself. This stigma and discrimination are key barriers that stop people from seeking help. Those who experience problems with their mental health should not feel alone or

embarrassed to seek help. It is important that residents of the Northwest Territories know help is available and where they should go to get the support they need for any type of mental health issue.

Through the Community Counselling Program, health and social service professionals are available to provide support and referral services to all communities in the Northwest Territories. Anyone who wants help to maintain their good mental health or who would like to access mental health or addictions services can call their local health centre or go onto the Department of Health and Social Services' website for more information.

For others, assistance can be found through speaking with elders or religious groups. The important thing to remember is you are not alone and there are people willing to listen and help.

Mr. Speaker, within the Health and Social Services Action Plan, "*A Foundation for Change*", the Department is committed to ensuring people have timely access to appropriate health care providers.

The Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority in partnership with the Stanton Territorial Health Authority and the Department has integrated its community-based mental health services into one community mental health team that provides services locally and coordinates specialized services for the entire

Northwest Territories. This is the first step in building a stronger mental health system from the ground up.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, one of the priorities of this Assembly is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of government operations. This restructuring is a good example of how we are supporting the sustainability of our system by focusing on administrative and program efficiencies – to manage our costs and improve the delivery of mental health services.

It is critical that persons with mental health concerns receive the services they need at the appropriate time. Integration of services also provides seamless support for those with mental health issues in Yellowknife, leaving the psychiatric unit and returning to the community.

The new integrated mental health team is located in the former Gibson Medical Clinic site in Yellowknife. It includes a total of eight mental health counselors, a psychiatric nurse, support from a psychiatrist, two adult services case managers, one receptionist/admin staff, one team leader for mental health integration and a manager of community mental health and addictions.

Northwest Territories residents are well served with timely access to the services they most need, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.