



16th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Social Programs

Report on Transition Matters

Chair: Mr. Tom Beaulieu

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL PROGRAMS**

REPORT ON TRANSITION MATTERS

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL PROGRAMS

REPORT ON TRANSITION MATTERS

INTRODUCTION

As the 16th Legislative Assembly draws to a close, the Standing Committee on Social Programs continues to monitor a variety of important issues and initiatives. Through this transition report, the Committee wishes to highlight areas Members believe will require continued attention in the 17th Assembly.

BACKGROUND

The Standing Committee on Social Programs is comprised of five Regular Members of the Legislative Assembly. The Committee's role is to consider the following, with respect to the Departments of Health and Social Services; Justice; and Education, Culture and Employment:

1. Review multi-year business plans and budgets, Bills, boards and agencies, including the Status of Women Council and programs for Seniors, Youth and Persons with Disabilities;
2. Review departmental performance, including that of boards and agencies; and
3. Consider any other matter referred by the House.

TRANSITION ISSUES

Anti-Poverty Strategy

In the spring of 2010, following a formal motion in the House, the Government agreed to begin work on an anti-poverty strategy.¹ A workshop entitled *No Place for Poverty* was hosted by Alternatives North and the YWCA in October 2010.² A discussion paper was due in Spring 2011, with actions to be considered by the 17th Assembly, but it was not available to the Committee³ and is now due in September for inclusion in transition materials.⁴ A summary of public input on the issue, *What We Heard From Northerners About Poverty* was provided to the Standing Committee on Social Programs during the August sitting of the

¹ Motion 11-16(4) Development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy. Carried on February 11, 2010.

² Tabled Document 136-16(5), *No Place For Poverty*. Tabled on February 8, 2011.

³ Presentation by Premier Roland and David Stewart to SCOSP, February 14, 2011.

⁴ Letter from Premier Roland to SCOSP Chairman Tom Beaulieu, August 22, 2011.

Legislative Assembly.⁵ Housing must be an important component of the Anti-Poverty Strategy; the NWT Housing Corporation's Shelter Policy Review is due to be complete and ready for review on the arrival of Members of the 17th Assembly.

Legislation

Various legislation that would be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Programs has been discussed or proposed to the 16th Assembly. Most notable are the inclusion of naturopaths and massage therapists in the *Health Professions Act*, and amendments to the *Legal Aid Act*.⁶

Community-based Programs and Services

The Committee is concerned that many programs and services are difficult to access in the smaller communities. The reason for this is often a lack of presence on the ground – for example, no local police officer, social worker, nurse, mental health worker, addictions counsellor, etc. This represents a very serious challenge to the effectiveness of many departmental programs. The “One Window” approach to accessing government services has been piloted by the Executive department in several communities. An update on the results may be useful to Committee members early in the first months of the 17th Assembly.

Family Violence

A great deal of work has been done in recent years by both the GNWT and non-governmental organizations to reduce family violence in the Northwest Territories. Within government, the Departments of Health and Social Services; Education, Culture and Employment; Justice; and the NWT Housing Corporation have all had a role in Phase II of the NWT Family Violence Action plan, which comes to an end on March 31, 2012. The NWT Coalition Against Family Violence has completed its final report, which makes 19 recommendations for work to be done in Phase III of the action plan.⁷ These recommendations warrant the Committee's attention in the 17th Assembly.

Department of Health and Social Services

Child and Family Services Act Recommendations

A full review of the *Act* resulted in 71 practical recommendations for improving the system. Most were accepted, or accepted in principle, and await funding allocations to complete. Some initial steps were taken in the 2011-2012 budget,

⁵ *What We Heard From Northerners About Poverty, August, 2011 (copy to SCOSP).*

⁶ *Letter from SCOSP Chairman Tom Beaulieu to House Leader Michael Miltenberger, November 9, 2010.*

⁷ *Coalition Against Family Violence, Final Report, March 31, 2011.*

notably to establish Child and Family Service Committees in at least five more communities, and to expand the Healthy Families Program. A number of other recommendations are advanced in the Department's Strategic Plan 2011-2015. The Committee held public meetings in ten communities; expectations are high that changes will take place over several years,⁸ along with regular reviews of the *Act*.

Auditor General's Recommendations on Health Programs and Services

The Auditor General of Canada reviewed Health Services in 2010, and reported to the Standing Committee on Government Operations in March 2011.⁹ The Report included seven major recommendations for the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Human Resources. The Standing Committee on Government Operations' report was tabled in May 2011, and included the recommendation that the Department of Health and Social Services update the Standing Committee on Social Programs on the progress of implementing the Auditor General's recommendations.¹⁰ This update has not occurred, and no implementation plan has been presented to either Standing Committee. The Government's response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations' recommendations was tabled on August 19, 2011. The 17th Assembly may wish to review the progress of the Department.

A Foundation for Change

The Department of Health and Social Services has agreed to provide quarterly updates on the challenging task of modernizing and streamlining the Northwest Territories' health system, but reminders are often required. The most recent update was provided on August 19, 2011.¹¹ The *Foundation For Change and the Draft 2011-2015 Strategic Plan* was provided on the same day, and therefore only a quick review was possible.¹² The strategic plan outlines the principal actions to be taken to modernize and streamline the health system over the next five years, and should be reviewed more carefully by the next Committee. With significant changes in the Department's leadership in recent months, a timely update early in the 17th Assembly's mandate may be appropriate. The governance of health

⁸ Committee Report 3-16(5), *Building Stronger Families, Report on the Review of the Child and Family Services Act*, tabled October 21, 2010.

Tabled Document 135-16(5), *GNWT Response to CR-3-16(5) Building Stronger Families, Report on the Review of the Child and Family Services Act*, February 4, 2011.

⁹ Tabled Document 161-16(5), *Auditor General's Report on the Department of Health and Social Services*, March 1, 2011.

Briefing Note, SCOGO, 11-04-13 BN AG's Report on HSS.

¹⁰ Committee Report 2-16(6), *Report on the Review of the Report of the Auditor General on Health Programs and Services – 2011*, Department of Health and Social Services, May 12, 2011.

¹¹ Letter from Health Minister Michael Miltenberger to SCOSP Chairman Tom Beaulieu, August 19, 2011.

¹² Briefing Note, SCOSP, 11-08-23 BN FFC HSS Strategic Plan 2011-2015, August 23, 2011.

authorities and their deficits, as well as the territorial addictions treatment strategy will likely be of particular interest.

Midwifery

The midwifery program has never been fully implemented. Service has been temporarily cut back in Yellowknife, but the Department of Health and Social Services continues to be committed to midwifery services in as many communities as is practical. A model to accomplish this across the Northwest Territories is being developed, to be completed in 2011-2012 for potential inclusion in the 2013-2014 Business Plan.¹³ It is the Committee's view that there should be midwifery services in every community.

Respite Care

In response to pressure from the Assembly, the Department of Health and Social Services is developing a territorial respite care program for inclusion in the 2012-2013 Business Plan.¹⁴ The new program will include existing services operating in Yellowknife, Fort Smith, Aklavik and Deline.¹⁵

Extended Health Benefits

The Government's attempts to modify and expand Supplementary Health Benefits resulted in only minor policy changes, but the Supplementary Health Benefits policy was rescinded, with program delivery falling back under Extended Health Benefits and Métis Health Benefits.¹⁶ The Government deferred including residents who lack coverage through their employer or other programs. A plan for accomplishing this has not yet been presented. The Department of Health and Social Services is also developing a pharmaceutical strategy to include generic drugs, drug pricing and efficiencies, and cost containment of pharmaceuticals, procurement, distribution, and access. These changes were to be made during the 16th Assembly; a progress update is overdue.

Addictions Services

The need for addictions services figured prominently in the Committee's recommendations in its review of the *Child and Family Services Act*, and

¹³ Tabled Document 18-16(6), Response to Petition 10-16(5): Expansion of the Midwifery Program, May 11, 2011.

¹⁴ Tabled Document 132-16(5), Response to Petition 8-16(5) – Respite Services in the Northwest Territories, February 2, 2011.

Motion 28-16(5), Provision of Respite Care Services, November 3, 2010.

¹⁵ Health & Social Services Business Plan, 2011-12, p. 41.

¹⁶ Tabled Document 104-16(5), Report of the Supplementary Health Benefits Joint Working Group, October 29, 2010.

Press Release by Health Minister Sandy Lee, Supplementary Health Benefits, October 29, 2010.

recommendations in this area were “conditionally accepted” by the Government, subject to the availability of resources. There have also been motions in the House supporting on-the-land treatment programs, and discussion of a territorial assessment and treatment facility.¹⁷ It is the Committee’s view that there is wide, general public recognition of the need for improved addictions services. More work is required to determine the best way to deliver these services. There should be a multi-departmental approach to supporting and promoting them. As resources will be required, advancing this work will likely be a critical issue for the 17th Assembly early in its mandate.

Department of Education, Culture & Employment

Early Childhood Development Review

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment is reviewing its early childhood development programs, and plans to incorporate the results into the Aboriginal Achievement initiative.¹⁸ This is due to be set out in the 2012-2013 Business Plan. The Early Childhood Development Framework for Action is due in September, 2011 and should be presented to committee early in the 17th Assembly.¹⁹

Auditor General’s Recommendations on Education

The Office of the Auditor General reviewed the Department of Education in 2009²⁰, making nine significant recommendations for improvements in a report presented to the Standing Committee on Government Operations in 2010.²¹ It was agreed between the Standing Committees on Government Operations and Social Programs that the latter would monitor the department’s progress in acting on the Auditor General’s advice. The minister of Education provided the first 7-page update in August, 2011.²²

Student Financial Assistance Review

The Assembly has passed several motions on Student Financial Assistance, calling for expansion of the program and increases in allowances, unaltered

¹⁷ Motion 5-16(6), Establishment of Mobile Alcohol and Drug Treatment Program, May 17, 2011.

Motion 2-16(5), Adult Diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, March 1, 2010.

¹⁸ Tabled Document 25-16(6), Aboriginal Student Achievement – A Status Report, May 16, 2011.

¹⁹ Letter from ECE Minister Jackson Lafferty to SCOSP Chair Tom Beaulieu, April 29, 2011.

²⁰ Tabled Document 31-16(5), Report of the Auditor General of Canada – Education in the NWT – 2010 – Department of Education, Culture & Employment, May 11, 2010.

²¹ Briefing Note, SCOGO, 10-05-08 SOAG Audit Education 2010 BN.

Committee Report 6-16(5), Report on the Review of the Auditor General’s Report on Education, November 1, 2010.

Tabled Document 150-16(5), GNWT Response to CR-6-16(5) Review of the Report of the Auditor General on Education in the NWT.

²² Letter from Education Minister Jackson Lafferty to SCOSP Chairman Tom Beaulieu, August 12, 2011.

since 2000.²³ The Minister has stated that the program is under review, which is expected to continue “throughout 2011-12.” Any proposed changes are to be implemented in 2012-13.²⁴

Department of Justice

Mental Health Diversion

The Committee has done preliminary research on special courts across North America where accused persons with mental health issues are diverted from mainstream courts and corrections system. The goal is for program participants to take responsibility for their actions, and receive treatment and support to deal with their conditions. The results are encouraging, including lowering rates of re-offending among diversion participants. The Committee’s research has been forwarded to the ministers of Justice and Health and Social Services for consideration and further work.²⁵

Legal Aid

Along with proposed changes to the *Legal Aid Act*, there is tremendous need for improved legal services, particularly in the smaller communities and in child protection cases.²⁶

Facilities

The Arctic Tern facility in Inuvik was closed on March 31, 2011, but the future of the building remains uncertain, as it required repairs before being put to another use. The Public Works minister was asked to report to Committee on the scope of work to be done and the schedule for new occupancy.²⁷ The Committee may wish to request this update early in its mandate. As a result of the closure of Arctic Tern, a planning study was done for a female offenders’ unit at the Fort. Smith Correctional Centre.²⁸ A final design was approved in January, 2011 and the project has been flagged as a priority project in the Capital Plan. However, no funding was approved to proceed in 2012-13.²⁹

²³ Motion 25-16(5), Expanding Student Financial Assistance Program, November 2, 2010.

Motion 6-16(6), Increase to Student Financial Assistance Living Allowances, May 17, 2011.

²⁴ Tabled Document 46-16(6), GNWT Response to Motion 6-16(6): Increase to Student Financial Assistance Living Allowances, August 17, 2011.

²⁵ Letter from SCOSP Chairman Tom Beaulieu to Justice Minister Jackson Lafferty, August 15, 2011.

Motion 12-16(6), Mental Health Court Diversion Program, August 22, 2011.

²⁶ Committee Report 3-16(5), Report on the Review of the Child and Family Services Act, Recommendation #29, October 21, 2010.

²⁷ Letter from Justice Minister Jackson Lafferty to SCOSP Chairman Tom Beaulieu, February 15, 2011.

²⁸ Annual Business Plan 2011-12, Dept. of Justice, p. 54, September, 2010.

²⁹ Briefing Note, Director of Policy & Planning of DOJ to Research, August 24, 2011.

CONCLUSION

This concludes the Standing Committee on Social Programs' Report on Transition Matters. Members extend their best wishes to the next committee when it convenes later this year.

