

Mental Health and Addictions

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has made a commitment in its mandate to focus on mental health and addictions, to enhance access to culturally-appropriate programs and services, address gaps in services, and enhance treatment options.

We have made progress. Last November, we tabled the strategic framework, Mind and Spirit: Promoting Mental Health and Addictions Recovery. This framework sets the foundation for improvements to mental health and addictions programs and services.

Three separate action plans will be put in place to support the framework. Each action plan will focus on areas requiring specific approaches – children and youth mental wellness, addictions recovery and mental health services.

These action plans will help address gaps in the system while improving service and program delivery by building on strengths.

But we are not waiting for these actions plans to be completed before we move ahead with needed improvements.

For example, enhancements have already been put in place to the NWT Help Line, which offers confidential, emotional support to NWT residents 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The NWT Help Line has now expanded its services to include telephone group sessions and a Facebook page. The telephone group sessions offer residents group counselling supports on a variety of topics ranging from depression and anxiety to addictions and recovery support. Residents can call in to these

sessions using their own phones. The sessions are free, anonymous and confidential. The Facebook page will also provide information on mental health and addiction supports, tips, community events, and information on upcoming telephone group sessions.

The Department of Health and Social Services is also working on implementing the new *Mental Health Act*. This is complex legislation which requires the establishment of a Mental Health Act Review Board to provide protection for the rights of patients. We are in the early stages of establishing this board.

The Review Board will hear concerns from individuals who are being held involuntarily under the new Act, or examine the status of patients with long-term involuntary admission, to ensure that they are not being held for an unreasonable amount of time. Culture and tradition are also taken into consideration with the new Act. The Chair of the Review Board has the ability to engage an Elder or other person as a cultural advisor to a review panel hearing.

Regulations are also being prepared, as well as training materials. The training materials will help front line staff understand the multiple processes and procedures required in the direct delivery of legislated mental health services.

The new *Mental Health Act* represents a substantive shift in practice, and our goal remains to have the Act in force this year.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to bring attention to the opioid crisis that is happening in Canada. As most of you are aware, there was also a surge of opioid overdoses here in the NWT last November. In light of this, I directed the Department to establish an NWT Opioid Misuse and Overdose Task Group. This group was established in December, and includes members from GNWT Departments and representation from the RCMP and the public. The task group will respond to the ongoing issues related to opioid drug misuse and overdose and will provide strategic oversight,

leadership and coordination. Work is well under way on a public awareness campaign to highlight the dangers of illicit drug overdose and misuse.

There is no “one-size-fits all” approach to addressing mental health and addictions issues, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to strengthening the supports for mental health and addictions by looking at the whole person – mental, physical, emotional and spiritual – and ensuring that we continue to increase our focus on culturally appropriate healing, which can include on the land based programming. Realizing our vision for community wellness and safety can only be accomplished by taking a coordinated approach with our partners, family, community governments and agencies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.