

Mental Health and Addictions

Mr. Speaker, one of the key priority areas in our government's mandate was to address the needs of individuals affected by mental health and addictions. That is why we released Mind and Spirit: Promoting Mental Health and Addictions Recovery in the Northwest Territories, which is our strategic framework that helps guide our work in this area.

I'd like to provide an update on some important initiatives we are taking to enhance and improve services in the mental health and addictions area.

One important achievement for our government when it comes to addressing the complex relationship between homelessness, mental health and addictions, is the successful opening of our new Day Shelter and Sobering Centre in Yellowknife.

This combined centre will reduce pressures on our first responders and emergency department, it will include links to services to meet basic needs like obtaining identification and access to housing, but also to longer term needs like employment, social supports, and long-term treatment. The new centre has more staff and more services that will allow clients and providers to collaboratively take the next step in improving health, wellness and outcomes.

Additionally, this location will now offer flexible spaces that provide opportunities to leverage partnerships with organizations like the City of Yellowknife's Street Outreach program and the Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation. These partnerships will enable the delivery of programming that is relevant to the people accessing the Day Shelter and Sobering Centre in a familiar and trusting

environment. This represents a positive step towards the delivery of person centred, recovery oriented services.

Mr. Speaker, another important achievement this year is the implementation of the new Mental Health Act which came into force on September 1st.

The Mental Health Act is one piece of the overall service continuum for mental health, but it is an extremely important tool in how we care for some of our most vulnerable residents. The new Act brings with it a number of improvements to the way we will provide care to individuals with mental disorders:

- The first is Patient Rights. This Act contains a very strong focus on patient rights. The Act and regulations outline specific ways that patients need to be made aware of their rights. At each step in the involuntary admission process, health professionals must notify and remind patients of their rights. They will do this verbally and by providing the patient written information. In addition, posters listing the rights of people detained under the Act will be posted in health facilities.
- The second is the establishment of a Mental Health Act Review Board. The Review Board exists to provide better protection of individual rights. Any person being held under the Mental Health Act who wishes to appeal a decision made by their health professional has the right to apply to the Review Board.
- Lastly, the new Act has provisions for Assisted Community Treatment. Assisted Community Treatment is a new option for involuntary patients. In cases where the physician has assessed it to be safe and where the patient agrees, involuntary patients can be supported to live outside the hospital, in the community according to a comprehensive, individualized treatment plan. While this will not be a fit for all involuntary patients, it does

represent an important option that will provide a less restrictive model of care and enhanced safeguards.

Mr. Speaker, while these initiatives I have spoken about represent significant and important work towards an improved approach to the delivery of mental health and addictions services, we know that there is still work to be done. As such, we are developing a Mental Health and Addictions Recovery Action Plan.

While the Mental Health and Addictions Recovery Action Plan is in the final stages of development, it will focus on activities that enhance community and land-based approaches to care, increase integration and collaboration and improve access to mental health and addictions services. The Action Plan will also feature aftercare services and supports based on best practice approaches and direction from Members and NWT residents. There will be an enhanced focus on aftercare services and supports in the Community Counselling Program and in community-based approaches with the recognition that recovery looks different for everyone. We will also continue to partner with Non-Government Organizations like the Tree of Peace, who also offer individualized aftercare supports.

The Action Plan will be released in 2018-2019 and will guide the delivery of mental health and addictions recovery services over the next two years.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to improve mental wellness services and supports for children and youth, the Departments of Health and Social Services and Education, Culture, and Employment have created 42 new Child and Youth Care Counsellor positions and seven Clinical Supervisor positions territory-wide over a four-year period, beginning in 2018.

Child and Youth Care Counsellors will spend a majority of their time in schools in order to be accessible to children and youth, and also to provide support to teachers and other school staff. They will reach out and offer assistance to parents and

families to better equip them to provide support to children and youth. Our counsellors will also have a presence in communities to ensure youth have options when it comes to accessing services. Counsellors will work year round, meaning that they will be available during the summer and school holidays like spring break.

Mr. Speaker I am pleased to advise that implementation in the Dehcho and Tlicho is well underway. Child and Youth Care Counsellors are currently in place in Fort Simpson, Behchoko and Whati. The counsellor for Fort Providence started on October 15th. The position in Fort Liard and a Clinical Supervisor position based in Fort Simpson are currently vacant, as is a third position in Behchoko. The Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority and the Tlicho Community Services Agency are actively recruiting for these positions and they are anticipated to be filled later this fall. Until these positions are filled, services to the schools are being provided by existing Community Counselling program staff and Child and Youth Care Counsellors already in place. The Departments of Health and Social Services and Education, Culture and Employment are also preparing for the planned roll-out of counsellors in the Beaufort Delta and Sahtu regions. These regions will begin to receive funding in the 2019-2020 school year.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to making sure that NWT residents and communities have access to a variety of programs and services that will support recovery from mental health and addictions issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.