

Cultural Safety and Relationship-Based Care

Mr. Speaker, as a government we have committed to putting the principles of reconciliation in action and to transform the way that we deliver programs and services to be more culturally informed and respectful throughout our mandate. Today I would like to update colleagues and the public on efforts we have been adopting within our health and social services system to put these principles into action to better serve our residents.

Embedding the concept of cultural safety into our health and social services system, has been one of our main areas of focus. Cultural safety is an outcome; when organizations adopt a cultural safety approach, the needs of clients and families are the priority, and Indigenous peoples feel safe and respected, free of racism and discrimination.

This means that cultural safety is key to improving quality and access to care for Indigenous residents because it addresses some difficult truths: that the status of Indigenous health is a direct result of government policies; that the legacies of colonization and residential schools have affected health outcomes and shaped the way services are delivered; and that the health and social services system has too often not been a place of healing for many Indigenous residents. Simply put, our commitment to cultural safety recognizes that Indigenous clients should not have to adapt to our system, but rather, it is the responsibility of the system to change and transform to meet the needs of clients.

In 2016, I tabled the document, Building a Culturally Respectful Health and Social Services System, that outlined our approach to making sure that cultural safety is incorporated across the Northwest Territories health and social services system. In

that document a commitment was made to develop a Cultural Safety Action Plan, in collaboration with Indigenous and Northern residents and partners. Based on the principle of, nothing about us without us, the Department of Health and Social Services began a knowledge sharing process with Indigenous and Northern peoples and staff in the fall of 2017, to hear their experiences, concerns, and aspirations for our system.

Mr. Speaker, through this knowledge sharing process we have heard directly from our residents that they envision a territory where Indigenous peoples, families, and communities enjoy physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and wellness. The stories shared in these sessions were powerful reminders that while our system has many strengths to build upon, there is still much work to do.

A whole system approach is required to embed cultural safety in the health and social services system. We began this shift with system transformation and the creation of the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority in 2016. This has created a foundation for cultural safety and placed us in a stronger position to respond to the needs of Indigenous and Northern clients. The Department is just beginning the cultural safety journey, but in the long-term it is expected to address the health disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people through increased access and use of health and social services, and improved client and community experience.

Mr. Speaker, we know that cultural safety is key to improving quality and access to care for Indigenous residents but it also provides a framework for better care for all NWT residents. We've heard from residents that relationship-based care is a priority for them, meaning that they want trusting, caring, and ongoing relationships with their care providers. Relationship-based care honours the value that Indigenous peoples place on relationships, and improves quality of care for everyone by putting the needs of clients and families first.

The Department of Health and Social Services recognizes that building long-term relationships between clients, practitioners, and staff makes a meaningful difference to achieving improved health outcomes and providing comfortable, safe, and respectful care for all people in the NWT. In August of 2018, the NWT Health and Social Services Leadership Council passed a motion to support the redesign of our system of care toward a team and relationship-based approach that is driven by community feedback and data, and built upon a foundation of trust and shared outcomes. This marks another significant milestone in the ongoing effort to create the operational philosophy, organizational culture, and governance structures that will allow us to achieve our vision of Best Health, Best Care, and a Better Future for all NWT Residents.

The next step in this journey will be the release of the Cultural Safety Action Plan in the coming months. There is much work yet to be done to embed cultural safety and relationship-based care throughout our health and social services system, and the Action Plan will be an essential guide as we focus our efforts to create a better system for all residents. As we do this work, our Department is committed to moving forward with continued collaboration with our partners and guidance from Indigenous and Northern residents. This is critical work for the health and wellbeing of our people, now and for the future. Thank you to all of those who have supported this work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.