

## MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### ALCOHOL HARM REDUCTION

February 9, 2018

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I talked about dealing with addictions. Today I want to talk about prevention. Here in the NWT we know the harm alcohol does to residents and communities, but you may be surprised to hear that more people were hospitalized in Canada in 2015-2016 for alcohol, the harmful effects of alcohol, than for heart attacks. This is one of the findings of the Report on Alcohol Harm in Canada published last summer by the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

The report concludes that provinces and territories with higher alcohol sales also have a higher prevalence of drinking. The NWT is part of this trend. The definition of heavy drinking is downing five or more drinks in one sitting at least once a month. Heavy drinking costs residents their health, even their lives, and it is costing the government hundreds of thousands of dollars in hospitalization costs.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, my grandmother used to say, and prevention in this case involves some straightforward changes. One is to reduce the open hours of liquor stores. The report shows that, when liquor stores are open more than 10 hours a day, there are notable increases in both impaired driving and alcohol-related hospitalization.

A second way to reduce alcohol harm is to increase the retail price. The report says that a 10 per cent increase in cost results in a 4.4 per cent decrease in consumption. In the NWT, we could choose to index alcohol costs to inflation and adjust costs for alcohol content. The aim of both of these measures is to reduce consumption. We must also follow most provinces by setting a minimum price for alcohol.

A third possibility is to have clinicians screen patients to spot harmful drinking patterns. The screening is followed by a brief counselling session aimed at reducing consumption and referral to additional care if necessary. Where this approach has been tried, it reduces hospitalization costs with an estimated \$4 return on every \$1 invested. The Canadian Institute for Health Information has developed a new indicator that tracks hospitalization entirely caused by alcohol. It can provide data for evidence-based decision making of allocating resources in the short term and monitoring the effectiveness of prevention and treatment programs over the long term.

The key is to connect policies around alcohol sales with a harm reduction approach. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mahsi.