

Cut liquor store hours to reduce hospital visits: MLA

Northern News Services

The MLA for Yellowknife Centre says liquor store hours should be cut and prices on alcoholic beverages raised as means to reducing alcohol-related hospitalizations.

"Heavy drinking costs residents their health, even their lives, and it is costing the government hundreds of thousands of dollars in hospitalization costs," Julie Green told the legislative assembly Friday.

She also suggested health-care workers screen patients for "harmful drinking patterns," and offer short counselling sessions to help them drink less.

According to a 2017 report on alcohol harm in Canada from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the Northwest Ter-

ritories has the highest rate in country for hospitalizations entirely caused by alcohol.

The territory also has the highest rate of self-reported heavy drinking, with 33 per cent of people ages 12 and older reporting downing five drinks or more (men) or four drinks or more (women) on a single occasion, at least once a month.

Glen Abernethy, Minister of Health and Social Services, said in 2015-16, the territory's rate of hospitalizations caused by alcohol was five times the national average, and that it had not changed significantly over the 10 years before that.

Although he would not commit to any of Green's proposals, Abernethy said "our minds need to be open to new approaches."

Green said the persistently high hospitalization rate is all the more reason to reevaluate the government's alcohol policies.

GNWT shielded from Carillion collapse fallout: minister

The finance minister says the Northwest Territories' agreement with Boreal Health Partnership protects the public purse from any fallout resulting from the collapse of Carillion PLC.

Carillion PLC, a multinational company, filed for compulsory liquidation in January. Its Canadian branch was subsequently granted one month of creditor protection, which it can extend.

Carillion Canada is part of Boreal Health Partnership, a private consortium that was awarded the contract to design, build, finance and operate the Stanton Territorial Hospital for 30 years.

On Wednesday, Robert C. McLeod said Boreal Health Partnership is on the hook to replace Carillion Canada with another partner or it will face "significant financial penalties."

"The lesson to be learned here," McLeod told the legislative assembly Feb. 7, "is that a P3 (public-private) partnership is a better way to go than having all the responsibility on the Government of the Northwest Territories."

Cabinet spokesperson Andrew Livingstone confirmed Feb. 9, that Fairfax Financial Holdings has offered to buy Carillion Canada's stake in the Stanton Territorial Hospital Renewal project.

The Toronto-based holding company, announced on Feb. 5 it agreed to purchase the services business of Carillion Canada, pending court approval.

The proposed purchase is in the due diligence review stage, Livingstone wrote in an email, but parties are hoping to close the deal by the end of March.

Fairfax will be required to fulfill the services set out in the original public-private partnership agreement on the Stanton Hospital renewal project.

Construction of the hospital is 75 per cent complete, and McLeod said the building is on track to be finished by November and to accept patients by the spring of 2019.

Regular MLAs call for public report on mining royalties

Regular MLAs say the government should demand greater transparency from mining companies in reporting the royalties and taxes they pay in the territory.

Under the federal Extractive Sector Trans-

parency Measures Act, mining companies operating in Canada are required to publicly disclose payments of \$100,000 or more made to federal, territorial, provincial and Indigenous governments, as well as governments abroad.

Although the dollar amounts paid out by mining companies are published, how these amounts are determined, and the percentage of profits to which the Northwest Territories is entitled, are not.

"How are royalties calculated? Are they consistent from one region to the next? ... How effectively does government manage its side of the relationship?" asked Cory Vanthuyne, MLA for Yellowknife North, in the legislature on Friday.

Both Vanthuyne and Kam Lake MLA Kieron Testart would like to see the GNWT publish its own annual report with more detailed information about royalties and taxes paid by oil, gas and mineral companies operating in the NWT, and the benefits of mining in the north in general.

Louis Sebert, the Minister responsible for Public Engagement and Transparency, said mining companies have resisted sharing their royalty calculations because "they didn't want to be sharing that kind of information with competitors, because royalty regimes and rates are based often on gross production or profits."

Testart responded that he always appreciates "impassioned defenses of secrecy from the minister of Public Engagement and Transparency."

The 2018 territorial budget projects that mining royalties will drop to \$16 million in 2018-19, down 54 per cent from the estimated \$35 million it took in from royalties in 2017-18.

Wally Schumann, Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, said compared with other jurisdictions in Canada, the NWT falls in the middle in terms of the royalty rate it charges mining companies.

NEWS FROM legislative assembly

by Sidney Cohen

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NNSI file photo

Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green says shortening liquor store hours and indexing the price of alcohol to inflation and alcohol content could help reduce heavy drinking.

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STRIKE VOTE MEETINGS

for GNWT Employees in Yellowknife will take place:

Monday, Feb 26 and Tuesday, Feb 27

Monday, Mar 26 and Tuesday, Mar 27

10:00 am, 12:00, 5:15 and 6:45 pm

UNW Building, 4910-53 St.

For more information visit:

<http://www.unw.ca/government-nwt>



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