

**ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE**

**QUESTION 126-18(3): GAPS IN FAMILY PLANNING SUPPORT COVERAGE**

**February 20, 2018**

**MS. GREEN:** Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. In my Member's statement, I noted that there is a group of low- or no-income non-Indigenous women who do not qualify for birth control or the new abortion pill. Why not? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Masi. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Mifegymiso pill is actually something that is prescribed by physicians in the Northwest Territories, so it can be prescribed. I think the difficulty that we have is that it is not covered by all of our insurance programs or supplementary health programs that we have out there.

We know in the Northwest Territories there is a gap of individuals who are not covered by our supplemental health programs and do not have insurance from their employer. All other individuals can get this covered. In that light, we are conducting an internal review of the supplementary health benefits program, and that work is happening right now with the view of addressing the coverage gaps that exist that I think this particular pill falls under. We are hoping to get that review done so that we can have some informed discussions with Members and the public on how we can work together to close that gap and in an equitable, affordable, and fair way.

**MS. GREEN:** I appreciate the answer from the Minister. I am glad to hear that he is proactively reviewing gaps such as the one that I have highlighted today. I want to point out to him that it is not just the new abortion pill. It is also birth control. Birth control is specifically excluded. Is that being reviewed, as well?

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Drugs that are covered under extended health benefits or non-insured health benefits that are covered by the federal government go through a lengthy process to determine whether they are covered. I am not sure why that particular medication is not covered, but I do know that it is covered by a large number of insurances, that it is covered by NIHB and other things, so it would be covered for a large number of the residents of the Northwest Territories.

What we are doing is a review of our supplemental health programs, which is going to focus in on the gap of individuals that are not covered, so low-income families who do not have insurance and what to cover for. We are going to get that work done so that we can all have an informed discussion in this House, in the public, about how we could have an affordable, equitable, fair supplemental health program for all residents of the Northwest Territories.

**MS. GREEN:** I appreciate the Minister's answer, but he did not answer the question. We were talking about, on the one hand, the provision of medical abortion; on the other hand, birth control. Neither is covered for this vulnerable group of women. Is the Minister also looking at the birth control end of it?

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** I kind of feel like I did answer the question. Maybe the Member did not like it. The bottom line is we are doing a review of the supplemental health program. If these things are covered under other insurances, like NIHB, we want to find a way to make sure that those low-income families without insurance are getting covered appropriately, and we need to make sure that it is done affordably, equitably, and fairly for all residents of the Northwest Territories. That includes all drugs, not just the ones that the Member is talking about today, that are covered under existing programs, that are not covered for this group.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that response. So, the new medical abortion pill, Mifegymiso, is available in Yellowknife. I am wondering when the government will make this pill available in regional centres that have doctors or midwives. Thank you.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Mifegymiso is actually provided through the Northern Options for Women program, which offers reproductive choices and abortion services for all women of reproductive age in the Northwest Territories, as well as the Kitikmeot Region of Nunavut. This program is currently offered in Yellowknife, the Member is correct, as well as Inuvik when we have particular physicians who have the knowledge providing local coverage in that area.

Consideration is currently being given to support the NOW program, which is the Northern Options for Women program, in other regional centres of the Northwest Territories so that it is available in a wider range throughout the Northwest Territories. We are exploring those options now to try to determine the cost and make sure that it could be done in a fair, equitable, and affordable way. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.