

# Health Authority's deficit growing

Northern News Services

The Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority says its \$76-million accumulated deficit continues to grow.

The minister of Health and Social Services said Wednesday that the deficit has been growing by a couple million dollars each year since 2007, and that the health authority is working to get spending under control.

Glen Abernethy said that about a year-and-a-half into the amalgamation of five of the territory's regional health authorities, there is still "significant work to do" to bring the new health authority, the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority, and the Tlicho Community Services Agency in sync.

Abernethy said it could take between five and seven years before the benefits of a fully-integrated system emerge.

Bruce Cooper, the deputy minister of Health and Social Services, said care wasn't properly coordinated among the eight different health authorities that existed previously.

"An elder may have to ride in a taxi for 300 kilometres just to get an X-ray," he told the Standing Committee on Social Development Wednesday. "You had a TB patient who had to see 13 people in three authorities before treatment started."

Cooper said these are examples of what happens when you have a "diffracted, non-coordinated system."

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the Northwest Territories spends \$17,150 per person on health care – more than any other jurisdiction in Canada.

High spending is primarily due to the costs of medical travel, and compensation and benefits for medical professionals.

Sue Cullen, CEO of the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority, said a locum physician – a doctor from the south who works in the NWT on a temporary basis – costs about 1.5 times that of a GNWT physician.

Abernethy said the department is working to get University

of Alberta medical students to do residencies in NWT, with the hope that they will "fall in love with the territory" and want to stay and practice here.

Cullen says a new campaign to discourage unnecessary lab testing, diagnostic imaging and prescribing of antibiotics and other drugs could help bring down costs.

## Make birth control accessible for all: Green

The MLA for Yellowknife Centre says when it comes to family planning, the Northwest Territories is failing a group of non-Indigenous women who don't have health benefits.

"The women who are losing out on birth control and medical abortion live on low incomes or have no income of their own," Julie Green told the legislative assembly Tuesday, adding they are often newcomers to Canada.

Women in this group must pay the full cost of birth control, said Green, "and it is expensive."

"For example, an IUD is about \$400. The new abortion pill is about \$425."

Mifegymiso, a pill that can be used to end an early-term pregnancy, is offered for free in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Green wants to add NWT to that list.

"This pill has become a preferred alternative for women rather than invasive surgical terminations," said Green. "The medication also provides women with a choice of treatment in a regional center, provided that there is a doctor or midwife present."

Green said it makes no sense that surgical abortions are free for all women, but that birth control and the abortion pill are not.

Though the Minister of Health and Social Services would not

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY News

with Sidney Cohen

email: [editorial@nnsi.com](mailto:editorial@nnsi.com)



confirm whether the government will make Mifegymiso free for all women, Glen Abernethy said the government is currently reviewing its supplemental health benefits program with the intention of addressing gaps in coverage for low-income earners.

Abernethy said all drugs are part of that review.

## Committee to hold another public meeting on proposed lottery act

The Standing Committee on Government Operations will hold another public meeting on Feb. 26 about its review of the Western Canada Lottery Act.

At the last meeting, a number of arts advocates requested that money from lottery tickets sold in the territory be used to fund arts programs and projects, in addition to athletics.

Traditionally, Northwest Territories lottery proceeds have gone solely to sports and recreation organizations.

The minister of Municipal and Community Affairs said she intends to direct all lottery money to the five regional sports and recreation organizations, and that they can decide how to use those funds.

The "clause-by-clause" review of the lottery act bill will be held at noon in Committee Room A at the Legislative Assembly.

# Tibbitt to Contwoyto coming along

*Previous delays due to weather conditions have not impacted winter road operations*

by Bogdan Stanciu

Northern News Services

Tibbitt to Contwoyto winter road traffic is going well and catching back up to schedule after storms in January delayed construction.

"We've never had severe winter storms that early in the project that lasted as long as they did, so we lost a number of days to storms but we have procedures put in place so we're getting closer to being caught up now" said Ron

Near, director of winter road operations for the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Joint Venture.

This year is looking to be the second busiest year on record.

"It'll be an excess of 9,800 loads, 330,000 metric tonnes" says Near.

Though the initial winter storms disrupted operations, there are no plans for the road to be open longer than usual.

"I don't anticipate the road to go any longer than the scheduled March 31st close

down" said Near.

Tom Ormsby, head of external and corporate affairs for DeBeers Canada, affirmed that the Gacho Kue operation is running smoothly, despite previous inclement weather.

"Not many people realize how much we prioritize safety, so when there are risks of whiteout we pause operations to ensure safety" said Ormsby.

"We have had a few weather interruptions in the last few

weeks, but we're catching up – we have flexibility built into

the program, so that when interruptions happen, we can

account for them"



Bogdan Stanciu/NNSI photo

**Trucks ready to be dispatched** out onto the Tibbitt to Contwoyto winter road line up at RTL construction.

February 28

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(867) 767-9143 ext. 12186  
or (867) 447-0436  
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[www.mla-greatslave.ca](http://www.mla-greatslave.ca)



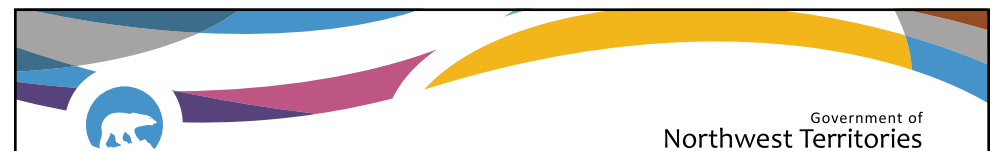
*Annual General Meeting*

**Thursday, March 22, 2018**

**Dinner starting at 6 pm • AGM to follow**  
Baker Community Centre, #2-5710-50th Avenue

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## CALL FOR APPLICATIONS Campaign Schools for Women

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) will be running Campaign Schools for Women in March 2018 to support and encourage women who are interested in running for public office.

Whether you're interested in running for your district education council or a seat in the Legislative Assembly, our Campaign Schools are designed to provide real supports to prospective candidates and those who support them.

Campaign Schools for Women will be held in:

**Fort Simpson  
March 3 – 4**

**Yellowknife  
March 10 – 11**

To apply, or for more information, please contact:

**Brenda Gauthier**  
GNWT Women's Advisory Unit  
[brenda\\_gauthier@gov.nt.ca](mailto:brenda_gauthier@gov.nt.ca)  
(867) 767-9025 Ext. 18006

The Campaign Schools are free of charge; however, the GNWT cannot provide funding for travel or accommodations.

[www.gov.nt.ca](http://www.gov.nt.ca)