

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 492-18(3): AVAILABILITY OF FAMILY PLANNING TOOLS

November 1, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this set of questions is for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Last winter we discussed the availability of family planning tools such as birth control and the medication that terminates an early-stage pregnancy called Mifegymiso. At that time, the Minister said his department was reviewing gaps in supplementary health benefits. Can the Minister update the House on the progress of this review as it relates to family planning? Mahsi.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the review of the supplementary health program is in relation to all coverage for all types of thing, including the things the Member has described. That review is going to take some time. It will likely go into the next government and be something the next government is going to have to make some hard decisions on.

We did have a brief chat this morning, and I did confirm that to the Member. Since then, I haven't had an opportunity to talk to the department. Taking the Member's point that waiting that long could be problematic for many, many women, I have issued a directive to the Department of Health and Social Services to put in some interim measures to cover the treatment or the Mifegymiso on an interim basis until the conclusion of the supplementary health review.

This means that it will be a payment of last resort and that individuals must use either NIHB, Extended Health Benefits, Metis Health Benefits, and an insurance if they have it through their employer or indigent health benefits. Basically, low-income workers who don't have insurance will be covered once this directive goes into place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister taking proactive action on this. The other issue that we talked about last winter was exploring options to make the pill available in regional health centres. Has there been any progress on making this service available outside of Yellowknife?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: There has been progress, but not enough. One of the challenges that we are facing is the diagnostic steps that need to be taken before the pill can be issued or prescribed. We are having some complications making sure that that can happen at a regional level. I commit to the Member that we will continue to do that work, and we will make sure that this is available through the NOW Program to all residents of the Northwest Territories. It will take a bit more time to make that happen.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister's efforts. Could he give us any proposed timing for resolving those issues? I guess at this point the question is: is it during the life of this Assembly, or will it be deferred until the next one?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: After our conversation this morning, I did talk to the department and issued that directive. I did tell them that I wanted this other issue resolved as quickly as possible. There are a few technical issues we have to work through. They said they would get me a timeline on how long they think it might take, but I directed and indicated I want to see it happen in the life of this government and not dragged out into the life of the next.