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MS. JULIE GREEN  
MLA, YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

**Oral Question 399-18(3): Specified Condition Funding Eligibility for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis**

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This letter is in follow up to the Oral Question you raised on October 16, 2018 regarding specified disease funding eligibility for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS).

With respect to the discussions regarding specific constituents with ALS, as you are aware ALS is not on the list of Specified Diseases that are eligible for coverage under the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Extended Health Benefits (EHB) Policy. As it is a GNWT Policy any changes to the policy, including adding disease conditions to the list, must be approved by Executive Council based on a comprehensive analysis to support the proposed changes. As I outline below, we are exploring options for the future of GNWT's Supplementary Health Benefit programs, in parallel with discussions at the national level.

However, as I indicated in the House, I can make myself available to meet with Members who have received consent from clients, to ensure clients are receiving all the necessary benefits and supports under the existing programs and services available.

As you are aware, many Northwest Territories (NWT) residents have access to Supplementary Health Benefits through an employer benefits plan or insurance and/or the Federal Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program. In addition, the GNWT currently provides Supplementary Health Benefit programs to eligible NWT residents for health services beyond those covered by the NWT Health Care Plan. These include Metis Health Benefits, EHB for seniors and EHB for Specified Diseases.

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However, the GNWT program and policies have not been substantively updated in over two decades, and we recognize there are gaps with the programs such that a number of NWT residents do not have access to any supplementary health coverage. Recent analysis estimates this could be as many as 2,000 to 2,500 NWT residents and these often include residents with part-time employment, single parent families, and new Canadians in the NWT.

Over the past year, the Department of Health and Social Services (Department) has been researching supplementary health benefit programs across the country and has examined its own program data. Over the winter, we will continue the review and reach out to individuals and stakeholders to better understand people's needs and concerns around health benefits. The purpose of the review is to propose options for the future of GNWT's supplementary health benefit programs and is anticipated to be completed by the end of this Assembly. This will ensure the GNWT is well-positioned to address supplementary health benefit reform early in the mandate of the 19th Legislative Assembly.

In addition, on February 27, 2018 the federal Minister of Finance announced the creation of an Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare. Provincial and territorial Ministers of Health continue to consider the implications of a national pharmacare program under the direction of Premiers through the Council of the Federation. The federal advisory council will release its report on options for a national pharmacare program in spring 2019.

Given these developments, it will be important to align our efforts on supplementary health benefit reform with those occurring at the national level, as Drug coverage is the largest component of the supplementary health benefit budget. The Department will continue to develop options for supplementary health reform that considers the ongoing work of the Advisory Council once more details on the approach at the federal level are known.

As this work progresses, I can commit to keeping Members updated and will seek the advice on any recommendations for supplementary health reform that we might provide to the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.



Glen Abernethy  
Minister of Health and Social Services

c Mr. Tim Mercer  
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. David Hastings  
Legislative Coordinator  
Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs