

**JULIE GREEN—MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE**  
**Homecare Expenditures**  
**Committee of the Whole—2019-2020 Operating Budget Review**  
**Dept. of Health and Social Services—February 26, 2019**

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Agreed. Thank you. Next, we have community health programs, operations expenditure summary, 2019-2020 main estimates, \$180,818,000, from pages 175 to 179. Any questions? Ms. Green.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a number of questions that relate to this activity. The first relates to homecare and support services. The estimates for the next fiscal year show a reduction from the current fiscal year. I'm wondering if the Minister can tell us why there's a reduction. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** The drop in this particular line is actually not as large as it looks because what this line does not show is the federal money that we're getting, which has been included in previous years' budgets. It hasn't come through the appropriation process to appear. It will likely come through by way of a supplementary. That will increase the budget here by a fair amount. There is a reduction in this area, a \$600,000 reduction, which is part of the \$2.5 million that was allocated in 2017-2018 but not spent. We had to make some hard decisions moving forward. We knew that we wanted to or, rather, we needed to make some additional investments in the Child and Family Services areas. There was some money in this particular area that was not spent. We are looking to stand up some work, and we're still making some progress around testing some of the new models for homecare, so we had to make the hard decision to reinvest some of those dollars in Child and Family Services.

I would like to point out that, since 2016, our budget in this area has increased by \$3.2 million, and that's even with the reduction of \$600,000 calculated in. This is basically a 24-percent increase in this area, and it has added 14 new homecare positions during that time, which is basically an increase of 21 percent of positions in this area. The \$600,000 does not result in the reduction of any services that currently exist in homecare. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Ms. Green.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a number of follow-up questions. How much money is the department expecting to come from the federal government, for homecare? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** \$790,000 in the upcoming fiscal year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Ms. Green.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My second follow-up question has to do with the

lapse of the \$600,000 in homecare. What steps is the Minister going to take to prevent lapsing of homecare money in the future? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Given the positions we've put in place and the programs we've put in place, we can fully spend the dollars that are in front of us. We did lapse some money in the previous year, that were the result of that \$2.5 million that was allocated to us. We anticipated lapsing some money again this year, as we continue to do our work around the family and community caregivers, and other programs that we are testing and modelling at this point. There is a chance, once we've done that testing, that we'll have to come back for future consideration, future asks, but at this point in time, for 2019-2020, based on the programs that we currently have in place, we figure we'd be lapsing about \$600,000. Rather than lapsing it, we wanted to use it for something where we knew there was a real demand, and that's Child and Family Services. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Ms. Green.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It was my understanding from the Minister's remarks during question period a few days ago that what drove this lapse was not being able to fill all of the positions. If that statement holds, then why is he confident there won't be any lapsing in the future? What would have changed to prevent lapsed funds in the future? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. If the Member were to go back and review Hansard, she would notice that the first indication was, in the first year we got those dollars, we lapsed over \$900,000. That was mostly because of the fact that we had to create positions, get positions evaluated, get positions established, and then go out and recruit and attempt to fill those positions. That work does take a bit of time, and, as a result, we did not fill the positions on day one of the fiscal year, and we ended up lapsing \$900,000. By the second fiscal year, we had all of the positions established. We had all of the positions created. We had a significant number of the positions filled, and we were still in the \$570,000 to \$600,000 in lapsing. We are still in that position; that is why we feel that we will be lapsing about \$600,000.

Having said that, we are doing the review of home and community care to help us figure out what best numbers are for these services in the future and what best types of positions are. We have also taken advantage of some federal funds and made some good investments in other areas, such as wheelchair accessible vans, negative-pressure wound therapy, Doppler assessment for peripheral arterial disease, and we have been able to use some federal money to roll those out in the Northwest Territories.

We have been making some progress in these areas. There is still work to be done. I accept that, but we feel that, given where we are today, that \$600,000 would be lapsed for 2019-2020. Once again, given the significant demands that we are experiencing with Child and Family Services and the \$3.2 million that we are increasing in that area, we felt that we needed to be able to put some of our dollars in to make that a reality, so that

we can meet the needs of children and families in this territory. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Ms. Green.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The part that I am finding is confusing is that the number of seniors in the territory is increasing significantly year over year, and the demand for homecare is increasing as that group ages. The part that I am not understanding is why it is not possible to spend all of the money allocated to homecare in a given year. The question is: why is it so hard to spend this money? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. In 2017-2018, we got a \$2.5 million ongoing investment into homecare that we weren't anticipating when we did our initial work in preparation for that budget. We had to stand up a significant amount of services, the creation of 14 positions and other things, to make that a reality.

As the Member knows, and I think all of the Members know, we want to spend money for a maximum benefit. We want to make sure that the things that we are designing make sense and have ongoing and long-term benefits. I get that the number of seniors is increasing in this territory, but in order to ensure that we are spending money wisely, we have to make sure that there is a solid business case, a plan.

I am sure that, if Members really wanted, we could throw money at issues for one-time things, but we would get no real benefit for it in the long-term. We want to make sure that our dollar investments have long-term benefits that are based on sound evidence as opposed to opinion. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Ms. Green.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I remain concerned that money for homecare has lapsed, given the increased number and needs of seniors in the territory. I understand that there is a homecare study under way now. Does this budget include implementation of recommendations from that homecare study in the 2019-2020 fiscal year? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Not at this time, Mr. Chair. We need to get that report in. We need to have that report analyzed. We need to make sure that our design is getting maximum benefit for the dollars that we do have.

If it turns out that the report suggests that we need to make significant new investments in this area, recognizing that this is the Non-Insured Health Benefits and not covered in most jurisdictions, then we are prepared to begin that work to build the business case that it is necessary to approach FMBS and seek additional funds in the future. There is still a lot of work before we will be ready to do that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Ms. Green.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to hear, if there are funds required for homecare, that this work would be expedited, and we would see a supplementary

appropriation for these funds. What my constituents indicate to me is that they need more help than they are getting. I want to make sure that their needs are met with money that is allocated to them, not only through the federal government, but money that may need to be allocated through the territorial government as well. Can the Minister assure me that those needs will be met in the next fiscal year, once they have been identified? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We do need to wait for the report to come in. That will help us articulate where our pressures are and where we need to strengthen our investments. That would certainly include ensuring that we are spending our money the right way today, which might mean changes of positions, re: description of positions, and doing those types of things.

If it does require money, we have an obligation to build a business case, as every department does, that is evidence-based and makes sense. We are prepared to do that work, but we can't guarantee, obviously, that it would make it as far as an investment in the life of this government. We will certainly make sure that FMB is informed and understands the challenges that we are under.