

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also had questions about the medical travel amount. I heard the Minister say that he is "tweaking," finalizing, and he will be coming back to the committee, but my question is: what portion of this \$2.4 million will come from individuals, versus the amount that will come from insurance companies? Thank you.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. When I met with committee, this was an area of concern. The input I feel I received from committee was, if we're going to be moving forward, we need to reduce the impact on those low-income families who don't have an insurance provider and who may have to come out of pocket for co-payments. That's the work we're doing right now. It's a small number of individuals, and we're just, like I said, doing the final little bit of work on that to make sure that our numbers are solid. I'd hate to quote a number and then present to committee in the coming weeks and have that number be different because we're still trying to finalize it, but it's down from what was presented to committee previously.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you. Will individuals without insurance have to pay a greater co-pay in the next fiscal year? Thank you.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's based on a threshold, an income threshold, and we're looking to increase that threshold. We're also looking at having different tiers for a threshold for families as opposed to a threshold for individuals. Some individuals will still have to pay the co-payment, but with the threshold changes we're looking to minimize the number of individuals who may have to pay a co-pay who don't have insurance to help them.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you. It sounds like a cost of living increase for people who are paying the co-pays for medical travel. Is there any reason to think it isn't? Thank you.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Without question, Mr. Chair, some individuals will notice a slight increase in their co-payment. Like I said, following the suggestions from committee, we're trying to reduce the number of individuals who are impacted. We are modifying the thresholds. We are changing and including different thresholds to help us ensure that we don't affect too many of our people. We've also been contemplating some other mechanisms to help support those individuals, but until such time as we get

a bit more of that work done, and I anticipate it will be very shortly, we are just trying to verify some things before we bring it back to committee so that we are coming back with a full picture, but yes, it will affect the cost of living for a small number of individuals in this territory.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Could the Minister quantify a "small number" of individuals, please? Thank you.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I already said I can't, because we are making some changes as per our discussion with committee and I would hate to throw out a number. Given that we are just doing some final adjustments right now, it might be different tomorrow, so I am not prepared to do that at this time. Yes, I am not prepared to do that at this time.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to know how the Minister is planning to roll this information out to the public about the increasing co-pays for medical travel. Thank you.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. When we finalize the plan, we intend to do some communication through our existing medical travel program. We will certainly do some press releases. We will make sure that the information is included on the appropriate websites so people can see it and are aware of it and are aware of the other mechanisms that may be available to them to help them offset some of those costs, so that they know well in advance. Our anticipation is that we won't make the decision and roll it out the next day, that we will have some time in between so people are aware it is coming.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. When would the new system take effect, the new co-pay system? Thank you.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. At some point during the 2019-2020 fiscal year, but as I indicated, we are not fully done. We are making some last-minute adjustments to make sure that we have it right, and that includes figuring out exactly the timeline to roll it out in a reasonable way without causing too much shock and awe from some of those individuals who may, may, be impacted.