

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

ALCOHOL HARM REDUCTION POLICY CHANGES

March 13, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Social lunch hour reviewing the Mental Health and Addictions Recovery Plan. These are issues the committee has been engaged with because we are well aware of the tremendous amount of harm alcohol causes. Today I want to talk about a relatively simple intervention that may help stream people with alcohol dependency into the treatment they need.

The report from the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research offers a powerful major conclusion: "The current levels of alcohol-related harm in Canada are not inevitable. There is now substantial international evidence identifying policies that can powerfully impact levels of alcohol consumption and related harm." One of those policies is the use of a screening tool for risky alcohol use, a brief intervention with advice to reduce consumption and/or referral to treatment. That's the policy I'm going to focus on today.

Mr. Speaker, research has shown that screening brief intervention and referral is a cost-effective method of harm reduction around the consumption of alcohol which, in turn, reduces demands on healthcare resources. The report concludes there is little to no activity in this area in the NWT, and the implementation is low nationwide.

There are a variety of barriers. One is that only five jurisdictions across the country have created guidelines for screening brief intervention and referral, or adopted those guidelines created by the National College of Family Physicians. Another barrier is getting practitioners to do the screening even where guidelines are in place. I think all of us understand that a conversation that begins with the sentence "let's talk about your drinking" is often unwelcome, and that's why so few happen in any jurisdiction. My hope is that the new cultural safety initiative will assist medical staff in having this conversation.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said at the beginning, alcohol dependence and alcoholism are not inevitable. The report's authors conclude the majority of evidence-based prevention policies and strategies are currently being implemented in at least one Canadian jurisdiction. They encourage sharing of best practices between jurisdictions in order to reverse current trends of increasing alcohol-related harms and costs in Canada. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mahsi.