

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

ADDICTIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH PLAN

June 6, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to offer my thanks to the Minister of Health and Social Services and his staff for completing the long-awaited mental health and addictions action plan. The plan's strengths include flexibility for clients seeking services and an ambitious timeline for implementation.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the work I did with my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Social Development to report on the treatment centres we toured 18 months ago and to make recommendations for this action plan. For example, we recommended that the department provide more information about how to access addictions treatment. We said, specifically that the department should provide plain-language documents describing what treatment facilities have to offer and the steps required to get in. I have spoken to many people who are unaware of how to begin this stage of their healing journey. I wish the department had included this recommendation in their plan.

I am happy to see our recommendation on enhanced aftercare has been partially adopted. We wanted to see stronger after care connections with the southern facilities and to help communities that want to develop peer support groups like AA. We want to ensure home communities are part of the plan.

When we did our tour, the committee and the Minister repeatedly heard facility staff and residents emphasize the importance of safe, secure, and sober housing after leaving treatment. We heard about the threats to mental and physical wellbeing posed by homelessness or the return to the site of one's addiction because of a lack of housing.

The reality is that many Northerners exiting treatment centres are in fact discharged into homelessness. I recently met a man in Behchoko who completed the program at Fresh Start in Calgary two years ago. He lives with his daughter in a house with 16 people. He is doing his best to stay sober but his housing situation is not helping. It makes no sense to me that we invest millions of dollars in treatment for Northerners but we do not assist them with the most basic means of maintaining their sobriety. It's worth mentioning as well that providing housing is cheaper than providing a return trip to treatment.

Mr. Speaker, the action plan says the department will "pursue basic solutions for basic needs such as safe housing for individuals returning from addictions treatment programs." Mr. Speaker, this is just not good enough.

That leaves how many of the 181 people who completed treatment last year without safe housing? My answer is, even if it's one, that's too many. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services.