

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 775-18(3): MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS PLAN

June 6, 2019

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. I would like to repeat my congratulations for getting the action plan done on mental health and addictions. I am curious about a couple of things that the plan is not doing. There is nothing in the plan about providing plain language material to people who are considering going south for treatment. My question to the Minister is: is the Minister planning to address this need? Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I answer the question, I just want to correct an unintended oversight from my Minister's statement yesterday. I acknowledged all of the people who have done incredible work to help us with our action plan, but I failed to acknowledge the important work that has been done by the Standing Committee on Social Development. They did their tour of the treatment facilities. They provided a report. We had debate in this House on the report. We agreed with the recommendations. We drafted our draft action plan. Committee did point out to us that it was a little lacking, that we didn't hit it square on the head. They made a number of recommendations for us for improvement. We took their recommendations and their thoughtful input to develop the plan that is before you today, and it is a better plan as a result of that interaction.

With respect to the Member's questions about how we are trying to ensure that our residents know of the different programs that are out there, we didn't include that in the action plan, because essentially we believed that that was already part of the job that we should be doing, and it was work that actually should have been done. We had relied on our professionals to get that information out there, but we realize that the information wasn't getting out there.

Recently, we updated our website to outline all of the different facilities and supports that we provide, including the different treatment facilities, but we are working more closely with our providers. That is not just staff within the Government of the Northwest Territories counsellors, but it is also counsellors in other organizations, like the Tree of Peace and other organizations, to make sure that they are aware of the different facilities and the strengths and the weaknesses of each of those facilities depending on your particular addiction. We are also trying to make sure that they are aware of all of the application processes, the ability to expedite referral, all of those things, so that they can share that information with those individuals who are coming to us. That is all on top of us doing the updates on our website. We are going to keep looking at these. We have put together some advisory groups to help us as we move forward.

If we keep hearing that we need to find other ways, we are certainly willing to explore that, but I didn't see that as an action item requirement. I saw that as a requirement of

doing business, and after meeting with the MLAs and taking their recommendations, we did provide that direction to the department. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. I will just remind everyone that we do have a lot of Members to get through today. Member for Yellowknife Centre. Oral questions.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the recognition from the Minister in his answer to my question, so this is an area that will be revisited. My next question is about housing. Having a place to live after leaving treatment is a basic need, as the report acknowledges, but the report has no specific actions about how to address this need. Can the Minister confirm that this issue needs to be a priority not just for study but for action and say how he intends to work with his colleague, the housing Minister, to address this need?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: There are a number of things that we are doing in the plan that tie together. The Member has had an opportunity to read it. Within the plan, we do talk about a seamless care pathway, which is from beginning to end and includes coming back to the communities. There is no question the Member is absolutely right. We do have some transition issues bringing some of these individuals who were homeless before they went for treatment back into homeless situations. We are not just studying, Mr. Speaker. As part of this plan, we have already reached out to the Housing Corporation and engaged in discussions about how we can do better on transition housing and things we can do to support different organizations within communities, Aboriginal governments, and other bodies to help us put in some supports or support organizations that wanted support to help us address the transitional housing issues that some of our residents may experience when they return from addictions treatment.

I do want to put out there, though, Mr. Speaker, not all residents who are returning from different treatment facilities or treatment options are homeless, but there are certainly some. As the Member said, if there is one, that is too many, so we are reaching out to our partners to start exploring solutions, not just another study.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister's answer that he is looking for solutions, that he acknowledges the issue. That is very constructive. My concern is, though, that it is discussion, it is not action. Is there any timing he can offer about when solutions might be identified and then implemented, something that moves us further down the road toward meeting this need?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Fortunately, in the Northwest Territories there are a lot of passionate individuals who are working outside of government to find solutions in these areas, and we are certainly willing and interested in working with them to provide transitional housing options. Recently, the Social Envelope Committee-of-Cabinet had some in-depth conversations about how we can work together as partner departments to support different initiatives that exist not just in Yellowknife but in communities throughout the Northwest Territories. We have more to learn on what these different organizations are proposing and how they would like to work with us or partner with us, but we are reaching out to them. I cannot tell you when a solution will be finalized, but we are doing the work and developing those relationships that I believe will give us the options we need to support our returning residents who have no housing options

previously.

DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake. That was three? I apologize. It's been a long few weeks here. Oral questions. Final oral question, Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I note that the Minister's plan is going to measure a suite of outputs such as wait times, staff training, and hospitalizations, but I do not see anything on the measure of outcomes, such as how many people completed treatment, accessed aftercare, or maintained their sobriety over a period of time. Can the Minister assure me that outcomes will be measured, as well?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Yes, absolutely. To help us with that, we are actually putting in a new information system. The price tag on that is \$1.55 million. It's the community counselling information system. That is going to help us track that information. Until that is fully in place, we will be doing our best to collect that data because we, like the Member, like all Members, we want to make evidence-based decisions in this area, so we will be tracking that information, as well.