

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

STATUS OF SERVICES FOR SENIORS IN YELLOWKNIFE

August 13, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Seniors are the heart of my constituency and, through the next decade, their population will grow by 134 households in Yellowknife each year. The fact that the seniors population is growing is not news. Our lack of preparedness to meet their needs is today's headline.

The NWT Housing Corporation has a suite of programs for seniors to repair their homes and complete retrofits so they can stay in their homes as they age. That is all good, obviously. The problem is that, while the seniors population has been increasing, program funding has not. The same amount of money is available this year as it was last year for programs such as CARE. The total budget for the NWT for aging in place retrofits is just half a million dollars. In our mandate, we said we would help seniors to age in place, but the truth is there are a lot of gaps.

Mr. Speaker, here in Yellowknife we have a crisis of available and affordable housing for seniors. Not one, and let me say that again, not one new unit has been added to the inventory during the term of this Assembly. There are 60 people on the waiting list for AVENS Court; 49 on the waiting list for public housing; and there is a backlog of seniors in emergency shelters, as well. We need at least 100 new units for independent living, and we need them now.

We also need new investments in homecare to help people age in place. I am looking forward to the paid family and community caregiver project, and I am pleased that Yellowknife is one of the pilot communities, given the size of our senior population, but this program does not include nursing and personal care. We need a plan that addresses the growing need for professional care by people who are trying to retain their independence by living at home.

Last but not least is the day program. Almost three years after it closed, the GNWT still has not found a replacement for the adult day program. I realize the Minister has looked at various options and there is now a survey out for seniors to complete, but the fact is there is nothing in place.

Mr. Speaker, as we age along with the rest of the population, we are going to need increasing support, whether that is help to say where we are, a smaller unit that is more affordable and accessible, services to help us with everyday tasks, specialized nursing, or social inclusion activities. On all of these fronts, the next Assembly must do better than we have. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.