

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
SOCIAL INCLUSION PROGRAM FOR SENIORS IN YELLOWKNIFE

February 11, 2020

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. The largest population of seniors in the NWT lives in Yellowknife, and their numbers continue to grow. In fact, elders are the fastest-growing segment of our population. Services for them have not kept pace with growing needs. As an example, we are now in our fourth year without a social inclusion program for older adults.

I am going to provide some background on this issue. Loneliness is a major issue for older adults. For all kinds of reasons, including health, mobility, income, and transportation, seniors may spend a lot of time at home alone. Some may choose to feel more connected to their community by taking part in social activities. Providing social activities is a key support for elders who want to stay in their own homes. Assisting seniors to age in place is a priority of this Assembly, but they need additional supports to make this a reality.

Adults who need this service are generally divided into two groups; elders who are physically frail are one group, while those with cognitive issues such as dementia comprise the other group. Avens used to host a program that got elders out of the house to enjoy activities and companionship and gave their caregivers a few hours off, but Avens found it difficult to serve both groups at once and decided to close their program in 2016.

Since then, the Department of Health and Social Services has been working on a replacement. One non-profit offered an adult day program for a few months before deciding it wasn't feasible for them to continue. The department has advertised twice for a service provider but got no takers. The latest initiative was a survey of seniors about their social activities that took place in August.

I am part of the target group, so I completed the survey as well. The questions were simple and focused on how much social activity I wanted and what activities interested me. As I was sitting at my computer, I wondered how many older adults, who may be much older than I am, have a computer and filled in the survey. I also wondered how many with dementia would be able to complete the survey.

Mr. Speaker, the previous Minister was committed to finding a solution to helping older adults meet their social needs. I am hopeful that the new Minister will make that same commitment to Yellowknife seniors. I will have questions for her. Thank you.