

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

ALCOHOL STRATEGY II

February 27, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, I spoke about the analysis by Harold Johnson of the harm alcohol abuse is doing in his northern Saskatchewan community. I could have been talking about the Northwest Territories. The problems are similar of binge drinking with terrible consequences. Today, I am going to talk about another approach to alcohol harm reduction that is informed by academic research.

The Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation project, known as CAPE, has quantified the costs of alcohol harm in the Northwest Territories at \$56 million a year. That is \$30 million more than we take in from alcohol sales. On their 2017 report card, we scored a failing grade on alcohol policy, mostly because we don't have a full and effective set of alcohol policies. Clearly, we have some work to do.

Mr. Speaker, we can get started by creating an alcohol strategy that provides an independent and evidence-based approach to public health policy. CAPE has identified seven areas which provide the best direct results for harm reduction. Alcohol pricing is one promising area. CAPE recommends a minimum price per standard drink for both on and off-premises sales, adjusted annually to keep up with inflation. A second area is one I have talked about before, which is to persuade doctors to do a screening, brief intervention, and referral with their patients who may need help with alcohol abuse. A third area is to move responsibility for the liquor commission into the department of health so there is some consistency around health and safety messaging.

It is not all bad news. CAPE gives the NWT credit for the graduated licensing program for new drivers because of its zero tolerance for blood alcohol content during the first year they have a license, and it is worth noting the NWT is one of only two jurisdictions that have mandatory health warning labels on alcohol cans and bottles.

Mr. Speaker, as legislators, we could do nothing and watch as the harm continues, or we could be the leaders this issue needs by supporting the development of a strategy with dedicated funding, an identified leader with a public health focus, and robust implementation and monitoring. We need to bring to an end simply picking up the pieces leftover from the harms of alcohol, and focus on prevention. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.