

MOTION - Carried — JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

Creation of a Northwest Territories Seniors and Elders' Strategy

June 11, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. WHEREAS the population of elders in the Northwest Territories is the fastest growing sector of the population;

AND WHEREAS this population is expected to increase by 56 percent to 9,400 people in the next 15 years;

AND WHEREAS 40 percent of seniors and elders have income of less than \$25,000 per year and thus live in poverty;

AND WHEREAS this 19th Assembly agreed in its mandate to enable seniors and elders to age in place with dignity;

AND WHEREAS there is a need for a whole of government approach to provide and co-ordinate services and programs that respond to the complex needs of elders;

AND WHEREAS there are gaps in current programs and services such as accessing financial assistance for home maintenance and providing suitable, affordable housing;

AND WHEREAS there is a need to revamp homecare programming for elders across the territory by providing a broader range and more client-centered services;

AND WHEREAS most communities need programs and transportation for elders to combat their social isolation;

AND WHEREAS the National Elders Strategy is not designed to meet the needs of the Northwest Territories, and the Northwest Territories' "Our Elders, Our Communities" strategy needs updating;

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Thebacha, that the Government of the Northwest Territories develop a strategy by engaging Northwest Territories elders that provides a whole of government approach to enhance and coordinate programs and services to elders going forward;

AND FURTHER, that the Government respond to this motion within 120 days.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Centre. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Mr. Speaker, I have an amendment to the motion. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Thebacha, that Motion 11-19(2) be amended by changing each reference of the word "elders" to the words "seniors and elders," except where it is the title of a document. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Centre. The motion is in order as amended. All those in favour? All those opposed? Any abstentions? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NWT Seniors' Society has requested this government and the previous government create an NWT seniors' strategy for a number of reasons. I am going to recap some of them today. The first is that the existing strategic framework, called "Our Elders, Our Communities," was published in 2014, and much has changed in that time. It also is a strategy that is specific to Health and Social Services. It doesn't address issues such as housing, transportation, social inclusion, and so on. While this is a good strategy in and of itself, it's not current to our needs at the moment.

There is, in fact, a national seniors' strategy, but it does not address NWT-specific issues. The result of that is that it's helpful, but not specific enough. What we have now in the NWT are 17 programs and services designed for or accessed by seniors and offered by departments and agencies, including Health and Social Services, the NWT Housing Corporation, Education, Culture and Employment, Justice, and Municipal and Community Affairs. What we need is to bring all of these programs together into one strategy and action plan for a whole-of-government approach. This is analogous to the integrated case management-type model, where there is a one-stop shop for all of these programs and services, and that roadmap is included in an NWT seniors' strategy.

Some of the areas that present gaps now that we know about are assistance with home maintenance, yard work, housekeeping, grocery shopping, and other essential activities of daily living. These are not covered by homecare. Homecare is a nursing function, and so this is a gap for seniors who are trying to age in place in their own homes. There will be much more said about homecare when the report is tabled, but we know that homecare is kind of a patchwork approach at this point and needs to be strengthened.

We also know that there is no transportation available to seniors outside of Yellowknife, and yet transportation is key to seniors who want to age in place in order for them to go grocery shopping and to meet their social needs, among other things.

Affordable housing is a huge issue for seniors. People have heard me talk before about how the waiting list at Avens here was six years long, last I heard. I know Avens is interested in expanding their offerings, but even when they do, there will still be a shortage of seniors' housing across the NWT and especially of affordable housing. We know that, for seniors, as for

everyone else in the Northwest Territories, housing is their biggest expense, and they need assistance in the form of some kind of a subsidy.

What I am asking for here, then, is that the government create the resources necessary to engage a broad stakeholder group of people who interact with seniors, not only within government, but also within the non-profit sector, so that there is a concerted effort to create a strategy that addresses this huge segment of our population, huge and growing, and that we live up to the commitments of allowing our elders to age in place by creating this coordinated approach to their needs.

Further, to the statement that I made today about elder abuse and the soon-to-be-lapsed strategy on combatting elder abuse, this also should be included in the seniors' strategy.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend to my colleagues in this House how we can make seniors' lives more functional, richer, and meet more of their basic needs by making a roadmap for how to do that and implementing it. Those are my opening comments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[...]

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure what COVID has to do with this. The Minister responsible for Seniors had already told the NWT Seniors' Society at the end of last year that he would not support the development of a seniors' strategy. I feel this is a really important strategy to support. That's the reason that I have brought this motion forward. I recognize that the government is not going to support this, but I look forward to the support of my Regular Member colleagues for our seniors to ensure that we've fulfilled our promise to them to make their lives easier in their old age. Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded vote. Thank you.