

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

ELDER ABUSE

June 11, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most of us love and respect the elders in our lives, yet abuse of this growing population is a problem all across the country. The detail of the problem is documented by Statistics Canada. NWT has the second highest rate of elder abuse in the country, and that rate is rising.

What is "abuse" in this context? The World Health Organization says it's a single or repeated act, or the opposite, a lack of appropriate action, which causes harm and distress to an older person, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust. It's a sad fact that all across Canada, elders are most likely to be victimized by those who are closest to them, namely, their own adult children.

Elder abuse can take many forms, but financial abuse and neglect are the most common in the NWT. It is important to note that overcrowded houses, poverty, and the legacy of residential school experience can make matters worse. The end result of any and all abuse is the same. It compromises the dignity, independence, health, and security of elders. It diminishes and frightens them. It's not what any of us want for our parents or for ourselves.

In 2015, the NWT Network to Prevent the Abuse of Older Adults released a five-year strategy with the title "Creating Safe Communities for Older Adults." The purpose of the strategy is to acknowledge and educate us about how widespread abuse is. The strategy starts from zero tolerance and offers 20 recommendations in four areas. Those four areas are public engagement, education and training, community responses, and policy and legislation. We all have a role to play in preventing elder abuse and creating safe, secure, and caring communities.

In the last four years, there have been some successes. The network itself is dormant, but the NWT Seniors' Society has been providing workshops called Creating Safer Communities for older adults. The workshops reflect NWT cultural practices and preferences. The goal is to empower communities to take on the issue of elder abuse themselves. Naming and speaking out about the abuse of older adults is one of the first steps to prevent it, and that's what today is about.

As Members of the Legislative Assembly, we have a special role to play. We can advocate in all four areas, but particularly those recommendations directed to government. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.