

**GNWT RESPONSE TO MOTION 4-17(2):
IMPROVING DRUG AND ALCOHOL TREATMENT PROGRAMS**

MOTION

THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, that the Department of Health and Social Services investigate the potential for successful implementation of similar programming and work with standing committees to test and introduce a similar program in the NWT;

AND FURTHER, that the government provide a comprehensive response to this motion within 120 days.

GNWT Response:

The need to improve NWT addiction services has been clearly identified as a serious concern across the NWT. The consequences of addictions often lead us to want to fix the problem quickly, but it is important that we step back and ensure that our response is going to be effective. Formal and informal caregivers have been working together for years to try to create the right combination of services to help heal individuals struggling with addictions.

The Department of Health and Social Services has recently released “*A Shared Path Towards Wellness: Mental Health & Addictions Action Plan 2012-15*”. This Action Plan takes a systematic approach to address some of the challenges of addictions in this Territory. The Department is targeting several areas for improvement within the Action Plan including exploring and researching the best options for addictions treatment for our unique Territory.

The Department reviewed the Old Crow Program that took place in 2004. This program was a 12-month abstinence-based addiction program that is reported to have had a 50% success rate. While this sounds promising, it is important to look more closely at the details of the program.

The claim of 50% success is based on 12 participants that were involved in a 10 week pre screening group. After the pre-screening group concluded 50% of the individuals did not commit to the program, resulting in only 6 individuals attending residential treatment and follow up group sessions. Of the 6 individuals who attended treatment, 3 maintained sobriety for a period of one year. So, in reality, only 3 of 12 individuals were successful after 12 months which indicates a success rate of 25%, not 50%.

The results of the Old Crow program have not been published. No formal evaluations have been conducted. The program was one year in length and was not provided again in the Yukon. There has not been any follow up with the 3 successful individuals to see if they are still abstinent.

With such a small sample size (3 people) it is not a program that can provide evidence-based results. As a result, the Department cannot commit to further research or implementation of the Old Crow program, specifically.

However, the Department has committed in its Action Plan to improve addictions treatment options through research and exploration of evidence based program options. In addition, the program offered in Old Crow mirrored some of the services already being offered by NWT Community Counselling Program (CCP) staff. For example, CCP staff provide pre treatment counselling for people wanting to attend residential addictions treatment. Follow up counselling is also available for individuals returning from treatment.

The effectiveness of formal treatment has been shown to improve as a result of the mutual support enjoyed by grouped participants preparing for and returning from treatment together, in contrast to the current approach at many treatment centres where individual treatment is offered without the availability of peer support or aftercare.

One program currently running in the NWT that is based on the principles of peer support is the "Matrix Program". The Matrix program is an evidence based program that has been offered in the NWT for the past 4 years by the Fort Smith Health and Social Services Authority's Community Counselling Program staff. The Fort Smith Authority has seen promising results.

Similar to the Old Crow program, the Matrix Program is community based meaning that people do not need to leave their home community to receive treatment for their addictions. The program can be used alone or as a compliment to more traditional residential treatment.

This type of community based programming can easily be adapted for other regions in the NWT and is well suited to integration with on the land treatment approaches. The Matrix Program could draw on community wellness and other local resources at limited additional cost.

To ensure the full potential of the Matrix Program is explored, and to meet commitments made in the Action Plan, the Department is working with the Fort Smith Health and Social Services Authority to conduct a formal evaluation of the program. The results of this evaluation along with other commitments made in the Action Plan such as the Minister's Forum on Addictions and best practice research, will help the Department to determine the most appropriate direction for addictions service options in the NWT. While it is important to improve services, it is essential to first ensure that an accurate understanding of the needs, gaps and existing promising practices is in place.

The improvement of programming based upon piloted and proven approaches responds to the critical need for more effective substance abuse treatment programming. Preparation for the anticipated increased court and corrections cost resulting from Federal bill C-10 provisions require urgent action to prevent and reduce the criminal activity so commonly related to substance abuse.

The Department of Health and Social Services is committed to providing mental health and addictions services in an integrated manner at the community and regional level, and specialized psychiatric and treatment services at the territorial level to best meet the needs of residents.