

Improvements in Mental Health Supports

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share the progress we have made in strengthening our mental health support services. Our focus is on the pressing issue of suicide prevention, as well as our ongoing efforts to enhance the Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery system.

Each suicide and suicide attempt has a profound impact on friends, families and communities. The distressing surge in suicide rates during 2022 has underscored the urgent need for a renewed approach. In June, I had the privilege of travelling to Iqaluit with key staff from the department and the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority to discuss suicide prevention with our counterparts in Nunavut. Our goal was to exchange insights, experiences and best practices.

Mr. Speaker, our discussions highlighted the importance of a collaborative response. Suicide prevention is complex, and no single solution can fully address it. To that end, we've formed a GNWT working group to establish guiding principles for a collective suicide prevention approach as well as a renewed commitment to support community-lead initiatives.

Budget 2023-2024 allocates an additional \$500,000 to the Community Suicide Prevention Fund, bringing the total annual funding to \$725,000 for communities and organizations to access. Our conversations with colleagues in Nunavut emphasized the importance of supporting community-led, grassroot approaches to suicide prevention. The enhancement of this Fund is an important step towards doing more to support communities.

Mr. Speaker, supporting regional and community-led initiatives beyond funding is equally important. When the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation released its suicide prevention strategy last September, officials from department and the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority traveled to Inuvik to meet with Inuvialuit Regional Corporation

staff to offer support for their work. Together, they came up with tangible ways that the health and social services system can reduce barriers to help the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation help individuals and families.

The same spirit of collaboration and commitment underpins our efforts to enhance the Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery system, with a particular focus on the Community Counselling Program.

Mr. Speaker, in 2020, we introduced the Stepped Care 2.0 approach in the Community Counselling Program, tailoring support to individual needs. Collaborating with partners such as the Mental Health Commission of Canada, Stepped Care Solutions, and Health and Social Services Authorities, we have expanded our services to reduce wait times and enhance accessibility. We have achieved remarkable outcomes, including same-day counselling and a noteworthy 79% reduction in wait times. Furthermore, we have launched eMental health options and established the Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery Advisory Group to guide our efforts based on lived experience.

Mr. Speaker, additional work is underway, to further transform the way mental health and addictions counselling services are being delivered. This work is being led by the Beaufort Delta region. There was extensive engagement with residents on what services they need, how they want to receive them and who they want delivering them. This work highlighted that educational qualifications are not what is most valued by residents, and so changes will be made in job descriptions and hiring practices to reflect this. The lessons learned from this work are being shared with other regions to inspire similar shifts in approach.

Mr. Speaker, it is also key to ensure that there are relevant, culturally based child and youth mental health services in the territory. We strive to evolve to a model that aligns and supports this as we move away from the historical institutional model of child and adolescent treatment facilities such as Trailcross and the Territorial Treatment Center. While a review is underway to provide longer term recommendations to ensure programming is available, there are two youth wellness camps scheduled for pilot in the

2023-2024 fiscal year. These camps are rooted in land-based activities, with culture, individual and group counselling embedded throughout, as well as a three-month aftercare component. Following this pilot, there will be a review to assess the effectiveness of this approach.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize our unwavering commitment to these crucial issues and to continuing to grow and learn from the people we serve. I am looking forward to hearing about new community and regional-based suicide prevention strategies that affirm the value of every life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.