

Addictions Recovery Supports

Mr. Speaker, substance abuse continues to challenge residents, family, friends and communities in the Northwest Territories. The Health and Social Services system has a range of options to help Northerners recover their health and well-being. I am going to summarize a few of those options that have taken shape in the 19th Legislative Assembly.

An approach called Stepped Care 2.0 has transformed the Community Counselling Program. by offering same-day or drop-in support, resulting in a 79 per cent decrease in wait times. Community counsellors can also help residents gain access to more specialized services, such as facility-based addictions treatment.

Mr. Speaker, we now have six facility-based addictions treatment programs. The department has recently contracted Sunrise Healing Lodge in Calgary to provide culturally safe, recovery-oriented, and person- and family-centered services. Sunrise Lodge responds to the request from residents for an Indigenous-led treatment option.

Even before individuals return from addictions treatment the Community Counseling program offers aftercare planning and support. This is part of our response to the 2022 Auditor General's recommendations to improve addictions services.

Mr. Speaker, we understand that the availability of safe, sober housing close to home is another important component of support to individuals in their recovery. The department is taking steps to establish community-based transitional housing options in four different communities. Work is progressing well in Inuvik and Yellowknife. The next step is to work program delivery costs into the next budget.

The department also continues to support the delivery of a managed alcohol program in Yellowknife. This program began during the pandemic as part of a comprehensive system of support for people living with addictions. This program takes a harm reduction approach by providing participants with a set dose of beverage alcohol in a safe setting, limiting intoxication levels and the consumption of non-beverage alcohol. The program is delivered in combination with housing, health care, counselling, and life skills.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize the leadership role Indigenous governments and community organizations have in delivering addictions recovery supports. Following a request from them, the department recently merged three existing funds into one. This combined fund will help reduce the administrative burden on Indigenous governments, while providing them more flexibility in determining the types of programs needed in their communities and how they will be funded.

I am pleased with the direction that our work is taking and the supports available to NWT residents, yet I recognize there is still more to do. We are planning for a combined Community Counselling Satisfaction and Addictions Recovery Survey for early next year. This combined survey will seek feedback on people's experiences with all the available NWT addictions recovery supports and services, including the types of supports they used, any challenges or barriers they encountered, and what needs to be improved.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude by discussing the ongoing dialogues initiated between myself, the department, and Indigenous governments. Our primary objective has been to enhance our collective efforts in addressing the addiction recovery requirements of NWT residents. I deeply appreciate these exchanges and their influence on shaping our course of action. Our shared goal is to help residents, and I firmly believe that the most effective solutions can be achieved through working together.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.