

Cannabis Public Education and Awareness Update

Mr. Speaker, I would like to update Members on our government's recent work on cannabis public education and community health engagement.

Northerners have told us that they want more evidence-based, culturally relevant information on the health effects of cannabis. In response to that call, the Department of Health and Social Services has been working in partnership with other Departments and agencies, as well as the federal government, to ensure that NWT residents have access to the information and resources they need in order to make informed choices.

When it comes to considering cannabis use, there are very real health considerations and risks, especially for youth, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and those who experience struggles with mental health. To make sure residents have this information, public education efforts are underway in communities throughout our territory, and will continue over the coming years.

Since January 2018, a government working group has been working together on potential public education and awareness initiatives. The initial phase of the GNWT's cannabis awareness campaign was launched in April 2018, and included web content, a direct mailer to all households and businesses, parent talk kits, social media advertising, and in-school education events. Using traditional and modern forms of advertising, we've been able to bring this information to people throughout the NWT.

Educational events have been delivered in schools and to our frontline health and social services professionals. Part of this work included having our Chief Public Health Officer present a question and answer session to Indigenous governments. We've also hosted expert seminars, bringing national experts to share new research and information on brain development, stigmatizing language, pregnancy and fetal development, and more. These learning opportunities have given our health care providers the chance to explore these topics in-depth, and learn about best practices being used around the country, and the world.

Mr. Speaker, just a few weeks ago, thanks to the support of federal Health Minister, Ginette Petitpas Taylor, and our Member of Parliament, Michael McLeod, Health Canada made an investment of \$1.8 million to support community-based cannabis public education in the NWT. This funding will support our approach for a harm-reduction model for cannabis that builds off of Canada's Lower Risk Guidelines for Cannabis Use, developed by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Our harm-reduction approach and community-based outreach plan allows us to engage residents in a dialogue about the realistic impacts of cannabis and other substances. Our goal is to provide factual information that won't glamorize or instill fear, but will educate youth, Elders, and families about substance use, allowing them to make informed choices for a healthy lifestyle.

Recently, I unveiled an exciting new augmented reality poster series as part of this campaign, designed by northern artist Cody Fennel, with input from youth and Elders across the Northwest Territories. These posters are generating discussion, but their effect is clear; this new approach to

messaging has a significant impact on how young people, and their communities, are reacting to and are engaging with cannabis education.

As our public education campaign continues, we will be expanding efforts into our communities. This will include an arts-based workshop series, in partnership with the Northwest Territories Association of Communities, that gives communities an opportunity to explore what substance use and abuse looks like to them, what resources they have, and their unique perspectives on health and wellness. These workshops will be adjustable for communities so they may create local content that focuses on their distinct needs and realities.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to providing accurate and up-to-date information about cannabis to our residents, in particular our youth and other people in higher-risk demographics, in ways that resonate with them. We have heard that when it comes to meeting this commitment, that our residents want cannabis information from government that is interactive, honest, and balanced. We will continue to work with Northerners as we roll-out the next phase of our cannabis public awareness and information campaign as it makes its way to every community in the Northwest Territories.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.