

Land Based Mobile Addictions Treatment and Aftercare

Mr. Speaker, we know that mental health and addictions issues are top of mind for many NWT residents and they are also priority area in the mandate of this Legislative Assembly. To guide our work to address these important issues affecting our communities, the Department of Health and Social Services developed a Strategic Framework for Mental Health and Addictions Recovery in the fall of 2016. One of the important focus areas of the Framework was to ensure that mental health and addiction services are delivered locally with culturally appropriate methods. I am pleased to provide Members with an update on our work to support on-the-land healing initiatives as part of our overall approach to addressing mental health and addictions issues in our Territory.

Mr. Speaker, collectively we have become much more aware of the devastating and prolonged effects of residential schools and other forms of systemic abuse which continue to affect Indigenous peoples and communities in the NWT. We know that many of survivors of residential school continue to live with the effects of this abuse, along with the impacts of racism and marginalization, and some have turned to alcohol and drugs in order to cope.

While there is no one solution to address the intergenerational impacts and legacy of residential schools on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples, families and communities, our health system needs to be able to support our residents on their healing journeys. To do this, our health system must respect traditional healing approaches and support Indigenous residents so that they may choose for themselves the paths to wellness that will be most relevant and meaningful, including on-the-land options.

We have heard from residents and Indigenous leaders through community engagement that on-the-land support is a necessary and foundational part of their healing journey.

A few years ago, we established the On-the-Land Healing Fund for Mental Health and Addictions. This supports Indigenous governments in developing and delivering culturally relevant and safe land-based healing programs specific to their regions, cultures, and peoples. The Department allocates \$1.23 million annually to the fund, accessible to regional Indigenous governments and community-based Indigenous governments. In 2018-2019, a total of eight contribution agreements have been signed. During this time we have also taken steps to ensure that land-based and culturally-based programs are supported as part of our overall mental health and addictions services system.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is taking another significant step towards supporting land-based healing options for our residents. We are proposing new land-based programming with a specific focus on mobile addictions treatment and family-based treatment. For many years our residents have told us that there is a need for mobile treatment options and person and family-centered approaches to mental wellness and addictions recovery supports, and we are taking the steps and actions to bring these options to them.

Mobile treatment refers to treatment that takes place in a community setting by coming to the community instead of people having to travel outside of their communities to get the help and support they need. This approach puts a strong emphasis on community involvement, and before an actual treatment program is implemented, the community must acknowledge that a substance abuse problem exists and be committed and involved in addressing the problem. Part of how we work to ensure that mobile treatment is providing meaningful and lasting benefits to residents is by making sure that community resources and stakeholders are involved in preparation and in coordinating aftercare and recovery supports.

The importance of aftercare and recovery supports as part of our mobile treatment approach was echoed by the Standing Committee on Social Development who provided recommendations around addictions programming following their tour of addictions treatment facilities in December 2017. These recommendations included: improving approaches to aftercare for individuals returning from addictions treatment, enhancing peer support, and providing family support programming for addictions.

Mr. Speaker our proposed land-based mobile addictions treatment approach addresses these recommendations in several ways:

- Land-based, mobile addictions treatment activities can serve as an important support for individuals returning from addictions treatment and who need support to solidify their recovery;
- participation in land-based activities connects participants with other individuals also working towards recovery from addictions, which enhances their social network and connections with peers who can provide support; and
- Indigenous governments can use funding to provide land-based mobile treatment and aftercare activities to individuals and families.

Mr. Speaker, a great deal of work still needs to happen to improve health and social outcomes of Indigenous people. The mobile treatment option is an important step taken in addressing what we heard from residents and aligns with this government's mandate commitment towards supporting individuals in their recovery journey from addictions. Recognizing the uniqueness of each person's journey and that there are many pathways to wellness, the Department provides a variety of support services including the community counselling program, child and youth care counsellors located within the school system, and southern treatment options just to name a few. This work represents the beginning of a system-wide transformation focused on creating safer spaces, increasing accessibility and

enhancing approaches to care across the spectrum of mental health and addictions recovery in the NWT.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.