

THE HONOURABLE GLEN ABERNETHY
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND
SOCIAL SERVICES

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Cultural Safety Action Plan

Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to addressing health inequities experienced by our residents. In October of last year I provided information on the Department of Health and Social Service's plans to move forward with our cultural safety and relationship-based care approach, and today I am pleased advise that the 2018-2020 Caring for Our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan will be tabled later today.

Research shows that Indigenous peoples experience a disproportionate amount of negative health and social outcomes in comparison to non-Indigenous people. It is our responsibility as a government to address this inequity head-on, especially given the fact that over 50 percent of the NWT's population are Indigenous. This is why it was critical that we develop a two-year action plan that will see immediate steps taken to address the health outcome gaps to promote healthy living and communities in the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, this Action Plan advances foundational work that began with the release of "Building a Culturally Respectful Health and Social Services System" in 2016.

Since the fall of 2017, the Department of Health and Social Services has held over 30 knowledge sharing meetings with Indigenous and northern people to hear directly from them about their experiences, concerns and aspirations for the NWT health and social services system. What we heard was that we need

to transform our system so that it is rooted in relationships that are trusting, caring and ongoing. The underlying theme in these meetings was the importance of cultural safety; an outcome where Indigenous peoples feel safe and respected, and free of racism and discrimination, when accessing health and social services.

Our Action Plan incorporates what we heard and provides direction on transforming the health and social services system through four objectives. They are creating an organizational culture of cultural safety; strengthening staff capacity for cultural safety; honouring traditional knowledge and healing approaches in care; and improving client and community experience.

Mr. Speaker, creating a health and social services system where cultural safety and relationship-based care is at the heart of everything we do requires a profound shift in how we operate and think about health care. It means that our health system will make it a priority to put the needs of clients and their families first so that they feel safe and respected when accessing health and social programs and services. By making this shift, we hope to see improved access, patient experience and health outcomes for all residents.

To ensure that we successfully implement our cultural safety action plan, we will be engaging with clients to identify whether their care has been culturally respectful; we will provide training to our staff so that they have the skills, knowledge and behaviours to provide culturally safe care; and we will make sure that cultural safety is embedded throughout the NWT health and social services system; from policies to practice; and is supported by leadership throughout our organization.

Work is already underway for staff training, with three pilot training sessions held recently. The first and second pilot focused on bias and building relationships in the workforce, and the third focused on cultural competence. Feedback from participants will help us develop a cultural competency training package tailored to the cultural safety needs of NWT residents. The goal of the training package is to equip staff with the tools needed to identify and resolve hidden biases that they may have when interacting with their clients accessing services, programs and support. We hope that this training, along with other actions we will take, will see attitudinal behaviours change which can lead towards improved relationship-based care.

Throughout this process of firmly entrenching cultural safety in our health and social services system, we are committed to ensuring that the voices of Indigenous peoples are acknowledged, heard and respected. To do this, we will increase awareness of client rights and responsibilities and develop mechanisms for feedback and complaints to support them on their care journey. We are already mapping out a system-wide client feedback process and quality assurance processes.

Mr. Speaker, another key component to embracing cultural safety is having a workforce that reflects the population it serves. To further encourage our Indigenous residents to be practicing members of our health care system and to promote wellness throughout the territory, the Department will be working with the Department of Finance, human resources section, as well as with Indigenous governments, to encourage youth and individuals considering a different profession to get into the health and social services field.

To ensure that we are moving in the right direction, we will be monitoring progress. We are integrating data collection on cultural safety into existing monitoring plans such as the patient experience questionnaire and community counselling program to see how we are doing. This approach further reflects our approach to make cultural safety part of how we deliver programs and services throughout our system.

Mr. Speaker, taking action to improve the way that Indigenous residents access health and social services and creating a relationship-based care approach for all northerners responds to multiple mandate commitments. But more importantly, it's the right thing to do and helps us address our past, promotes reconciliation, and helps to build healthy strong communities. By implementing what we heard, we can achieve our vision for a territory where Indigenous peoples, families and communities enjoy physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.