

Long-Term Care Plan

Mr. Speaker, the priorities of the 18th Legislative Assembly include a commitment to take action so that Seniors can age in place. Our government's mandate builds on this priority by committing the Department of Health and Social Services to complete a projection of programming needs; develop updated capital plans to address the need for long-term care beds, and to develop a regulatory framework and financing options that will allow us to meet the growing demand for long-term care in the Northwest Territories.

As Minister of Health and Social Services, I remain committed to supporting Seniors and Elders to continue living in their homes and their communities for as long as possible. But we also need to provide for those who can no longer live independently, even with the appropriate supports.

Looking after our Seniors and Elders is an important part of this government's vision for the future, which the Premier outlined yesterday. Looking ahead 20 years, we see a healthy and prosperous territory built on Northern strengths and advantages. We see residents who have good paying jobs, who are able to provide for their children and to purchase their own homes and healthy food. We see a territory where people have broken the hold of colonialism to achieve economic self-determination and who no longer have to rely on income assistance to survive.

That is why our government undertook a major review of the current state of long-term care in the Northwest Territories and the projected need for these services as our population continues to age. The Northwest Territories Long-Term Care Program Review Final Report, completed late in 2015, provided projections for long-term care bed needs over a 20-year period and achieved an important mandate commitment.

The report projects that by 2026, there will be a shortfall of 258 long-term care beds in the NWT – which represents a substantial increase over the 180 beds available today. Plans were already in place at that time to replace and expand the Jimmy Erasmus facility in Behchoko, and to build an 18-bed long-term care facility in Norman Wells. But the addition of these 27 new beds did not begin to meet the projected needs as identified by the report.

Mr. Speaker, we know that today there are Elders who are waiting for a spot in one of our long-term care facilities, and that these lists will continue to grow. We must take action. In response to this need, the departments of Health and Social Services, Finance and Infrastructure worked closely to develop a plan to respond to these needs.

Today, I am pleased to confirm that the Capital Estimates 2018-19 include the first concrete steps towards addressing the long-term care gap in the Northwest Territories. Funding is included to develop 72-beds in the old Stanton Hospital in Yellowknife; to begin planning for a 48-bed long-term care facility in Hay River to serve the entire South Slave region; and to begin planning for a similar facility in the Beaufort Delta region.

As we move forward, we also recognize that we need to address future pressures in the Dehcho region and in Yellowknife. In the near future, we will undertake a feasibility study to assess the potential for a combined Health Centre and a long-term care facility in Fort Simpson that would add 28 new long-term care beds in that region. To support our continued partnership with AVENS: A Society for Seniors, the Capital Estimates includes funding for a much-needed kitchen and laundry renovation to support future expansion.

Mr. Speaker, there is more work to be done, and the support of Members, stakeholders and our partners throughout the NWT will help us continue to advance this important work. We have committed to developing a regulatory framework and financing options for long-term care, and that work will get under way in the near future.

The improvements and investments being made in long-term care will support our Seniors and Elders to remain as close to home as possible when it is no longer possible for them to remain in their community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.