

Indigenous Knowledge Holders Advisory Body

Mr. Speaker, in 2016, I tabled a document titled, Building a Culturally Respectful Health and Social Services System. This document was a commitment made to ensure that cultural safety is woven into the fabric of the health and social services system and integrated into all aspects of management, operations, and front line services. It speaks to the importance of honouring traditional healing practices. It also speaks to working in collaboration with partners to ensure that all aspects of health and social services are culturally safe and respectful for our patients and clients.

In my meetings with leaders of Indigenous governments over the past few years, they have stressed how important it is that we work together to improve health and social outcomes in the Northwest Territories. Leaders have stressed that, historically, health and social services have been provided in a way that has not always respected or incorporated Indigenous peoples' presence, culture, traditions or needs and they have told us we need to change.

In May 2016, we met with representatives from Indigenous governments across the Northwest Territories to talk about how we can make these changes happen. We agreed to set up a task team to come back with recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, over the past year, staff from the health and social services system have worked with staff from several Indigenous governments to explore options for working together. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions made by staff from the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, the Gwich'in Tribal Council, the Tłı̨chǫ Government, the Dehcho First Nations, the NWT Métis Nation, and the Kátł'odeeche First Nation.

Together, we have developed a draft terms of reference for an Advisory Body of Indigenous Knowledge Holders that would work with the Department of Health and Social Services, the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority, the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority, and the Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency. The mandate of this group would be to provide guidance on how our health and social services system can better incorporate Indigenous traditions, culture and healing practices leading to improvements in care and health outcomes for our residents.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed Terms of Reference have been shared with leaders of Indigenous governments across the Northwest Territories, asking for their feedback. In the very near future, I plan to meet with leaders and reach agreement on how we can move forward to ensure there is a formal, structured process for transforming the NWT health and social services system by incorporating Indigenous knowledge and traditions throughout our program and service delivery. This work will help further the Department's vision for best health, best care, for a better future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.