

Child and Family Services Quality Improvement Plan

Mr. Speaker, one of this government's top priorities is the safety and well-being of children and youth receiving Child and Family Services. This includes making sure we maintain a child's connectedness to family, community and culture.

We have learned from our experiences, through internal and external audits, through engagement with Indigenous governments, and through feedback from stakeholders that we need to better manage, resource, structure and sustain changes implemented under the Building Stronger Families Action Plan.

We know that the improvements we were making under Building Stronger Families were the right approaches. The issue was how we were doing it. This is why I directed the Department to develop a two-year Quality Improvement Plan that highlights how we will be taking action to address the issues identified through our own internal audits, the 2018 Auditor General of Canada's report, and recommendations from Indigenous governments, Child and Family Services Staff, Foster Family Coalition of the NWT, and key stakeholders.

Later today, I will table the response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations' Review of the 2018 Report of the Auditor General of Canada on Northwest Territories Child and Family Services. The recommendations from this report have also informed the Quality Improvement Plan.

The Quality Improvement Plan, which will be released this summer, is the accumulation of everything we have learned from our experiences and engagement with all key stakeholders. It is a living document that will focus our efforts on ten

priority areas for making the improvements that our Child and Family Services system requires. As we take action in these priority areas, the Plan's flexibility will help us make sure that we are on the right path, are adjusting our approach when needed, and are considering all options for success.

In May, Department of Health and Social Services and Authority staff held a face-to-face meeting with Indigenous governments to go over the draft Quality Improvement Plan. The meeting was fruitful and we are in the process of reprioritizing, refining, and adding new action items to the Plan as a result of feedback received from the Indigenous governments.

Although the Plan is still being finalized with respect to the actions that we want to achieve, the Department has already begun work in implementing a significant portion of the action items. To date, approximately a quarter of the action items in the Plan have already been completed, while other items have been initiated or are ongoing.

For example, we piloted forensic interviewing training with fifteen Child and Family Services staff in April. This training was aimed at improving skills and confidence of frontline staff in conducting child protection investigations, and in interviewing children or youth alleged to have experience some form of abuse or neglect. The training was recorded and will be shared with all regions for future training. In February and May of this year we also provided refresher training on the four established Structured Decision Making® Tools to CFS managers, supervisors, and some senior staff, and delivered this training to front-line staff in the Sahtú and Beaufort-Delta regions.

Mr. Speaker, last November, we implemented a new guardianship standard that requires the completion of a home assessment for anyone applying for guardianship under the Children's Law Act. The standard was sent to all child and family services

staff, and informs them on the screening requirements and supports they need to provide to potential guardians taking on the responsibility for caring for a child.

New investments by our government allowed us to acquire twenty-one new positions to assist in addressing capacity and staffing challenges across the Northwest Territories. A territorial wide recruitment for Child and Family Services staff is in place to fill these positions and address vacancies. Increased staffing will improve the ability of children and family services to meet our responsibilities by reducing caseloads and enhance our capacity to provide better support for children, youth and their families.

Mr. Speaker, improving the quality of the child and family services system, as with all systems, is an ongoing process, and not a single event. It will take time, and we may need to adjust, rework or add action items, in order to ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth in our care. This is why transparency and partnership are foundational to the quality improvement approach we are taking to address the changes our CFS system requires.

We will report regularly on how we are doing by publicly releasing regular updates on the Quality Improvement Plan. We will continue to work closely with stakeholders, Indigenous governments, all of our staff, and those accessing our services to ensure that we remain on the right track towards improving the Child and Family Services System.

I am confident the partnerships we are forming and the quality improvement steps we are taking will change the narrative of the NWT Child and Family Services system to place of improved practices and outcomes for children, youth and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.