

Cultural Safety Update

Mr. Speaker, eliminating anti-Indigenous racism in the Health and Social Services system is an urgent issue in the Northwest Territories, and across the country. I rise today to reaffirm our government's commitment to advancing cultural safety for Indigenous residents. This is a commitment we will continue to act on and today I will provide an update on the progress we have made over the past year.

The principles of cultural safety and anti-racism are widely recognized as a best practice when it comes to providing services in the health and social services settings. The Department of Health and Social Services began this work in 2013, partnering with Indigenous communities to establish a strategic vision and action plan based on the information gathered from consultation with Indigenous residents, and through research.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we have made significant progress in this area. I want to recognize the Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Training initiated in June 2021. A team of Indigenous staff designed this made-in-the-North training over a four-year period. They took a "nothing about us without us" approach by piloting 13 different training sessions and seeking regular guidance from the NWT Health and Social Services Leadership Council and Indigenous Advisory Body. Over 200 staff participated in the pilot training program.

Since the launch of the final model last summer, approximately 100 staff have taken the training. Monthly sessions will be offered in 2022-2023, beginning with Fort Smith and the Beaufort Delta. The training is delivered in-person over two days and includes a mix of guest speakers and activities to build the knowledge, skills, and self-awareness of staff. The goal of this training is to enable staff to better understand anti-Indigenous racism and improve cultural safety for Indigenous clients.

Mr. Speaker, training is an important component of this work, but it is not enough. That is why we have established the new Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism unit within the Department of Health and Social Services. They will lead our efforts to embed the principles of cultural safety and anti-racism throughout the system. I am pleased to advise this unit is now fully staffed. These positions focus on priority areas including Indigenous knowledge and wellness, child and family services, and training and content development. The people in these positions will also serve as expert consultants within the system, ensuring that our commitment to cultural safety is present in guiding all policies, programs, and documents. This new team is comprised almost entirely of Indigenous staff from the NWT and uses a decentralized approach that allows staff to work from their home community.

We know that Indigenous staff within our system often experience anti-Indigenous racism themselves and have ideas about how to make things better which are not always heard. A community of practice for Indigenous staff is being planned. It will provide a supportive peer network, and a safe forum to share innovations, wise practices, and offer solutions to address anti-Indigenous racism.

Mr. Speaker, cultural safety has been at the heart of the development of the new Indigenous Patient Advocates program that will launch in 2022-2023. This team of regional Indigenous staff will provide direct support to Indigenous residents to help them access services in Fort Smith, Hay River, Stanton Territorial Hospital, and Inuvik. This team will also help to inform and drive this work being done to promote cultural safety and address anti-Indigenous racism.

We are committed to this important work and expand on these programs when and where possible. We will continue to collaborate with Indigenous partners, communities, and staff to ensure this work is being driven by Indigenous people, as we strive for every Indigenous person in the NWT to experience a culturally safe environment every time they interact with the NWT health and social services system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.