

Senior Citizens Month and Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Mr. Speaker, June is Senior Citizens Month, a time for us to acknowledge and celebrate the important role Seniors have in our families and communities. Seniors teach us about culture, tradition, and history. Their wisdom is integral to making wise decisions that will impact future generations of Northerners.

This Legislative Assembly has made a commitment to enable Seniors to age in place, with dignity. The Department of Health and Social Services is working with Housing NWT and the Departments of Municipal and Community Affairs, and Education, Culture and Employment to ensure that Seniors may live longer and healthier lives wherever they live.

Mr. Speaker, these departments are working together to increase supports for Seniors to make it easier for them to stay in their home community, and in their own home if that is their choice. Funding is being provided to enhance inclusion and safety, and remove community-level barriers to aging in place, along with initiatives to protect Seniors from abuse.

Senior abuse and neglect are very serious concerns for this government. One of the challenges we face is the underreporting of abuse, making it difficult to get a complete picture of the problem.

This issue is not unique to the North, or even to Canada. June 15th is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. It is an official United Nations International Day acknowledging the significance of Elder abuse as a public health and human rights issue around the world. Ministers Responsible for Seniors across Canada recognize the seriousness of this issue and collaborate at the federal, provincial, and territorial table to address it.

Mr. Speaker, a cross-jurisdictional work plan includes projects that identify gaps, challenges, as well as policy and program options to address financial and non-financial abuse of Seniors. The GNWT is actively participating in this work and will implement the regulatory and service delivery changes required to protect Seniors. We are also working with our partners to launch a public awareness campaign focused on Senior abuse, and to provide training to GNWT staff that teaches them how to identify signs of abuse.

The GNWT works closely with the NWT Seniors' Society to support organizations, communities, families, and individuals confronted with Senior abuse. They operate a 1-800 phone line to offer information, referrals, and support to Seniors and their families. Questions about Senior abuse account for about 20 percent of the calls they received last fiscal year, so this is an important issue in NWT communities.

Mr. Speaker, the NWT Seniors' Society also delivers the Creating Safe Communities for Older Adults workshop to communities that want to increase awareness of abuse of older adults, learn how to identify the abuse, and take action.

Individuals experiencing abuse can reach out to the RCMP, call Alison McAteer House toll free, contact the five Family Violence Shelters, or connect with a health and social service provider in their community for support to discuss steps they can take to protect themselves.

Mental health supports such as community counsellors, the NWT Help Line, as well as various online resources are available for those who are affected by Senior abuse, Mr. Speaker. I encourage anyone who wants to know more to reach out to the NWT Seniors' Society or visit their website.

Enabling Seniors to age in place requires an effort at the territorial level, at the community level, and within NWT families. Over the next few months, NWT residents, Indigenous and community governments, and stakeholder organizations will have the opportunity to participate in community-based in-person and virtual engagement sessions, as well as complete an online survey to inform the work the GNWT is doing to enable more Seniors to age in place, no matter where they live in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the month of June, I encourage you to take a moment to honour the Seniors in your life and in your community, and remember that all Seniors have the right to choose their own lifestyle, express themselves in their own language and enjoy the same privileges granted to all residents of the NWT.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.