

Update on Health System Human Resources

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update Members on the work being done to recruit and retain health and social services staff in the Northwest Territories. This work responds to the mandate commitment of the 19th Legislative Assembly to increase the number of resident health care professionals by at least 20 percent.

The recruitment and retention of health and social services professionals has become an increasingly high-profile issue over the past year, as the COVID-19 pandemic has made shortages of health and social services personnel across Canada worse. The Department has identified several reasons for the shortages we are experiencing here in the NWT, and they are working hard to address these issues.

Mr. Speaker, the market for nurses and other health professionals has become increasingly competitive across the country. The result is staff shortages resulting in service reductions or closures in many jurisdictions, including the Northwest Territories. Within the Northwest Territories, these challenges became more serious during the summer of 2021 and leading to the temporary closure of the obstetrics unit for three months.

Despite these challenges, I am pleased to report that the most recent vacancy rate data is trending downward for positions that the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority is actively recruiting. These positions include Child and Family Services positions, Licensed Practical Nurses, and Registered Nurses. Still, we recognize that the recruitment and retention of health and social services professionals requires a sustained effort.

The Health and Social Services System Human Resources plan, which will be tabled later today, provides a roadmap for how we will continue recruitment and retention efforts over

the long term. Several of the plan's initiatives are specifically designed to attract Indigenous and Northern residents to pursue careers in this field.

Mr. Speaker, our vision is to establish a robust and representative workforce supported by strong leadership and an organizational culture rooted in the principles of cultural safety and anti-racism. I believe achieving this vision will allow our workforce to thrive, and in turn support continuous improvement in the delivery of health and social services to meet our goal of best health, best care, for a better future for NWT residents.

The plan's overall success will be measured through improved employee engagement and satisfaction, decreased vacancy and turnover rates, and increased representation of Indigenous and Northern employees.

To attract more Indigenous people and Northerners into these careers, we have created the annual NWT Health and Social Services Career Guide, with the 2022 edition launching this month. We are also rolling out the Graduate Transition Program to support new graduates moving into permanent positions within the health and social services system. The Clinical Observership and Job Shadowing programs will provide additional tools to encourage youth to explore health and social services careers.

The Family Medicine Residency Program begins its third intake of doctors this July, with our first two residents graduating from the program this month. This vital program is helping to develop, recruit, and retain local Family Physicians committed to living and working in the Northwest Territories.

To better understand why staff are leaving, we began conducting exit interviews and staff movement surveys over the past year. We also began sending new staff entry surveys three months after their start date to help us better understand their experiences and address their concerns early in their career with us.

Using the data and insights gathered from these interviews and surveys, we have been able to prioritize certain action items within the Human Resources Plan that focus specifically on Employee Engagement and are key to addressing a decline in staff morale and overall staff retention.

This summer, we will launch an updated Orientation Program, as well as a Strategic Onboarding Framework for all new staff, as well as for those who are new to their position. These programs welcome new employees and help them integrate into their role and environment. They also provide new employees with development opportunities and mentorship. The launch of a system-wide Learning Management System, to support equal access to mandatory, and job specific training, is still on track for this summer.

In addition to the launch of Elsevier Clinical Solutions in November 2021, two new programs have recently launched to support nursing, and nursing development. The Specialized Nursing Transition program will assist registered nurses who wish to expand their scope of practice into specialized areas. It will start as a pilot program within the Obstetrics Unit at Stanton, and then expand to all specialty areas within the system.

The Community Health Nursing Competency Program provides training to nurses to develop the competencies required for practice in a Community Health Nurse setting.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would once again like to express my gratitude to the staff within the health and social services system, for their continued hard-work and dedication to the wellbeing of residents of the Northwest Territories. The entire health and social services leadership team recognizes and appreciates their tireless efforts during challenging times. We remain committed to providing the tools and supports needed for our workforce to thrive and succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.