

Cultural Safety and Anti-racism Update

Madam Speaker, over the last decade, the Department of Health and Social Services has been working on improving cultural safety for the Indigenous communities and peoples across the Northwest Territories. This critical work underpins everything the health and social services system is doing to redress the legacy of colonialism and anti-Indigenous racism that has so deeply affected Indigenous communities. This Fall a distinct Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism division was established to create a system-wide environment where Indigenous peoples feel safe, respected, and free of racism and discrimination when accessing health and social services.

To reach this goal, all staff need a foundational understanding of the ways in which anti-Indigenous racism is experienced within health and social services. We know that racism creates barriers that prevent Indigenous people from seeking necessary health care. Racism is contributing to outcomes such as a shorter life expectancy and higher rates of suicide, mental health and addiction issues, and chronic diseases. We know that training all service providers about cultural safety and anti-racism is imperative.

Madam Speaker, the department launched mandatory training for all health and social services system staff and since June 2021, 240 staff have participated in the training sessions. The training takes place in-person over two days and is delivered by Indigenous guest speakers and a staff team that is primarily Indigenous.

Another significant initiative to improve client and community experience is the introduction of Indigenous Patient Advocates. Four Senior Indigenous Patient Advocates have been hired and are completing orientation and training in preparation for the launch of the program later this year. The Indigenous Patient Advocates will work in NWT acute care facilities in Inuvik, Fort Smith, Hay River, and Yellowknife. Madam Speaker, they will support

Indigenous clients to address their concerns, complaints, and questions, while bridging culture and language barriers.

Part of improving the relationship-based health and social services system in which cultural safety is valued has included the design of a new social innovation project called the Baby Bundle. The Baby Bundle is available to all parents with children up to six months. The bundle contains clothing, toiletries and a tote bag that turns into a backpack. The program has been in development for several years and has been tried out with parents in four regions to ensure it contains the right items. The bundle is combined with prenatal care and well child visits. These visits are critical to improving health outcomes and positive early childhood development indicators for all children. This initiative also offers an opportunity for health care providers to build relationships with families, to engage in discussion and decision-making, and to share in culture-centered approaches to welcoming a new child to the world. The program was launched last week, and 600 Baby Bundles will be available across the NWT this year.

Madam Speaker, we are working to bring the NWT to the forefront of change and innovation in the way the health and social services system responds to the needs and priorities of Indigenous clients and helps them feel confident about cultural safety and comfort that results in improvements in health outcomes for future generations.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.