

**NWT Alcohol Strategy**

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Health and Social Service, I am deeply concerned about the harm alcohol does in our territory. Alcohol misuse continues to have significant, even devastating effects on individuals, families, and communities, resulting in poor health, social problems, and economic costs. We know that alcohol impacts NWT residents disproportionately compared to other regions in Canada, and alcohol-related hospitalizations and deaths remain several times higher.

In January, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released new guidelines with the message that all Canadians who drink any amount of alcohol should consider the harmful effects on their health. The guidelines elaborate on the risk of violence, and injury which increases with every drink beyond the low-risk threshold of two standard drinks per week.

Mr. Speaker, this is a considerable reduction from previous low-risk drinking guidelines. This new information is based on updated research about the links between alcohol and the risk of cancer and other chronic diseases, and the relationship between alcohol misuse and the risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence.

In 2019, the Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation Report gave the Northwest Territories a failing grade on our alcohol policies and recommended that the territory develop an Alcohol Strategy. The purpose of the Alcohol Strategy for the Northwest Territories, which I will be tabling later today, is to reduce alcohol-related harm for the whole population of the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, this strategy was shaped by a thorough literature review and engagement activities, undertaken using a Gender-Based Analysis Plus lens. Multiple rounds of

feedback collected from community and Indigenous leaders and advisory bodies with cultural knowledge and lived expertise helped us to validate the strategy.

Addressing alcohol-related harms requires the collaboration of several departments and agencies including Health and Social Services; Finance; Justice; Education, Culture and Employment; Infrastructure, the Northwest Territories Liquor and Cannabis Commission, and the three Health and Social Services Authorities.

Mr. Speaker, the actions align with many of the calls to action published by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and will help to address the recommendations emerging from the Office of the Auditor General Report on Addictions Prevention and Recovery Services in the NWT.

There are 15 actions in the strategy, focusing on communications, policy development, prevention, public safety, and treatment. The strategy is accompanied by a work plan developed collaboratively with the involved departments. It provides steps and timelines for each action, as well as a monitoring and evaluation plan to track outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, work has already begun on several components of the strategy, and we look forward to working closely with communities to tailor these actions to their needs and priorities as we move forward.

We heard repeatedly that trying to get and stay sober was lonely, and many communities are “alcogenic”, meaning there are few social activities that do not involve alcohol. A direct lack of social support was a common reason that people experienced a relapse in their drinking. We also heard that connections to family, community, and culture were important factors in lasting recovery and wellness. The actions in the Alcohol Strategy aim to shift the focus around alcohol in our communities, and build communities that support recovery, over the long term.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that addressing alcohol misuse is a complex issue that requires a coordinated and collaborative approach. The Government of the Northwest Territories

is committed to working with our partners, including Indigenous governments and organizations, communities, health organizations, and others, to reduce the harms associated with alcohol.

The NWT Alcohol Strategy aims to engage everyone in the NWT in addressing alcohol-related harms; by reflecting on our own behaviour, celebrating those who are in recovery, and providing support to one another to improve wellness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.