
Department of Health
Government of the Northwest Territories

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RESPONSE:

Standing Committee on Public Accounts Final Report:
Public Review of Tabled Document No. 5-12(3)
Report on the Auditor General of Canada and on a
Comprehensive Audit of the Department of Health
(Tabled March 24, 1993)

February 17, 1994

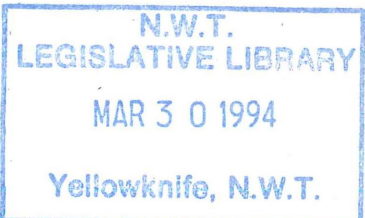


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INTRODUCTION

At the request of the Legislative Assembly, the Auditor General of Canada conducted a comprehensive audit of the Department of Health during the latter part of 1991 and early 1992. The audit covered the period from the transfer of administrative responsibility for health services in 1988 to early 1992. The Auditor General reviewed the department's mandate and organization, its planning for the future, management of people, information systems, capital assets, financial matters, and reporting and accountability.

On November 17, 1992, the Auditor General's Comprehensive Audit of the Department of Health (October 1992) was tabled in the Legislative Assembly and was referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) for review.

Based on public hearings held in 1993 in Yellowknife, Rankin Inlet and Inuvik, on written submissions, and on its own review of the Auditor General's Comprehensive Audit of the department, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts identified a number of concerns and made 28 recommendations aimed at improving the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of the Department of Health's operation. The department has already initiated action on many recommendations, and considerable progress has been made toward the development of a new vision for health and health services in the Northwest Territories (NWT), in collaboration with health and hospital boards and professional organizations.

The Department of Health is grateful for the guidance received from the Auditor General and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

RECOMMENDATION 2

THAT BUDGET CONTROL AND FINANCIAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS POLICIES WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SHOULD BE REVIEWED TO ENSURE THAT THEY REFLECT THE IMPROVED FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES OF HEALTH AND HOSPITAL BOARDS;

AND FURTHER THAT, WHERE NECESSARY, REVISIONS TO POLICY DIRECTIVES SHOULD BE DEVELOPED IN CONSULTATION WITH HEALTH AND HOSPITAL BOARDS AND READIED FOR FULL IMPLEMENTATION BY SEPTEMBER 30, 1993.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 2

The need for budget control has been identified in the preliminary draft of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The department and boards are presently working on funding issues, reporting and timetables, through a joint working group comprised of representatives from the boards, department and the Financial Management Board Secretariat.

A new health and hospital financial system has been approved and will be implemented by the fall of 1994.

- h) budget workshops for Inuvik, Hay River, Fort Smith, Kitikmeot, Baffin, Mackenzie;
- i) support to H.H. Williams Memorial Hospital/Woodland Manor and Baffin Regional Health Board operations review process.

RECOMMENDATION 5

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PREPARE, AND WHEN NECESSARY, REGULARLY UPDATE A DOCUMENT WHICH FORMALLY DEFINES THE RATIONALE, PURPOSE, AND SUBSTANCE OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES WAY FOR HEALTH DELIVERY;

AND FURTHER, THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH DEVELOP A PROCESS THROUGH WHICH STAKEHOLDER ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHERS CAN PROVIDE INPUT INTO THE ONGOING FORMULATION OF THIS APPROACH.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 5

In June 1993 a draft document was developed and discussed by board chairs, CEOs, the Department of Health, and professional health organizations. Stakeholders are reviewing the document and a final draft will be ratified through the MOU process. This document will be reviewed annually at a meeting between the Minister of Health and the contributing parties.

RECOMMENDATION 7

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ACCORD A HIGH PRIORITY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORKLOAD ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURES APPLICABLE TO NURSES IN THE NWT;

AND FURTHER, THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE NWT REGISTERED NURSES ASSOCIATION AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS SHOULD CARRY OUT WORKLOAD ASSESSMENT STUDIES WHICH ENABLE BETTER PLANNING FOR THE ALLOCATION OF NURSING RESOURCES.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 7

A workload measurement tool utilizing standards for core programs in community health centres and public health centres was developed from the 1990 workload study. The core programs were reviewed and refined in July 1993. As computers are introduced into the health centres the workload measurement system will be implemented to provide ongoing and measurable data.

The department and boards will review the tool once it is operational. A regular review process for updating the tool has been established. National standards and an accreditation process for community health services is being developed by the Canadian Council on Health Facilities. The NWT has two members on the committee responsible for overseeing this work.

Draft standards are expected to be ready for piloting in May 1994. Fort Resolution and Cambridge Bay have been selected as test sites.

RECOMMENDATION 9

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR ATTRACTING AND SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WHO WANT TO ENTER INTO THE FIELD OF HEALTH ADMINISTRATION;

AND FURTHER, THAT THE MINISTER OF HEALTH TABLE A COMPLETE STRATEGY DOCUMENT IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY BY THE FALL SESSION OF 1993.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 9

A Health Human Resource Plan for the Northwest Territories has been completed with input from stakeholder groups and is attached for the Committee's information (Appendix A).

RECOMMENDATION 11

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS, REVIEW SOURCES, ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND AMOUNTS OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS WISHING TO PURSUE STUDIES IN HEALTH PROFESSIONS OR HEALTH ADMINISTRATION;

AND FURTHER, THAT THE DEPARTMENTS SURVEY CURRENT STUDENTS ENROLED IN HEALTH-RELATED DISCIPLINES TO DETERMINE THE ADEQUACY OF AVAILABLE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, AND INCLUDE SURVEY RESULTS IN THE REPORT.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 11

The department is collaborating with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE), the department responsible for promoting education and providing financial support for post-secondary school education. The department will, in consultation with ECE, compile and publish a resource booklet on student financial assistance in 1994. A questionnaire is being developed by the department in consultation with ECE, to survey students on the adequacy of financial assistance. The results of the survey will be available in 1994.

The Health Bursary Program provides financial assistance to individuals taking post-secondary training in a health career for which there is a need in the Northwest Territories. A selection committee, comprised of Department of Education, Culture and Employment and Department of Health employees, evaluates applications based on predetermined point rating criteria. Awards are designed to supplement other funding available to students through Student Financial Assistance, employer support or other organizations. Only residents of the NWT are eligible to apply. Application deadline each year is May 1st. Late applicants are evaluated on the same point rating criteria if monies are freed up during the fiscal year due to defaulting recipients.

RECOMMENDATION 12

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ESTABLISH A PLAN WHICH PROVIDES AN EFFECTIVE CROSS-CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM FOR NEWLY HIRED STAFF;

AND FURTHER, THAT FOR ALL DEPARTMENTAL PERSONNEL, INDIVIDUAL TRAINING PLANS WITHIN THE PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND PLANNING PROCESS SHOULD INCLUDE A REQUIREMENT FOR CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING AT LEAST EVERY FIFTH YEAR;

AND FURTHER, THAT SENIOR MANAGERS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PROVIDE A MODEL FOR OTHER EMPLOYEES BY EACH PARTICIPATING IN A PROGRAM OF CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS PRIOR TO DECEMBER 31, 1993.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 12

The department and health and hospital boards encourage staff participation in cross-cultural workshops presently offered by Arctic College and other agencies. All nurses completing the Advanced Nursing Skills In-service Program (ANSIP) receive a cross-cultural training module.

Development of a cross-cultural program is under way and will be implemented for all newly hired headquarters staff in the fiscal year 1994/95. The program package will be distributed to the boards, who are responsible for their own regional cross-cultural programs.

A proposal for an intensive cross-cultural immersion learning experience for senior managers has been developed, and will be implemented in the fiscal year 1994/95.

RECOMMENDATION 14

THAT ALL SUPERVISORS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT COMPLETE IN-SERVICE TRAINING IN THE USE OF THE GNWT PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND PLANNING SYSTEMS FOR STAFF APPRAISAL NO LATER THAN APRIL 1, 1994.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 14

Five performance review workshops have been delivered since October 1993. By the end of February 1994, 90% of supervisory staff have either participated in a workshop or are registered to participate.

RECOMMENDATION 16

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PREPARE A DOCUMENT WHICH:

1. SUMMARIZES HEALTH RESEARCH STUDIES CARRIED OUT WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT SINCE 1988; AND
2. PROPOSES POLICY PARAMETERS FOR THE DESIGN, APPROVAL, ETHICAL STANDARDS, CONSULTATION, LOCAL INVOLVEMENT AND REPORT DISTRIBUTION OF FUTURE HEALTH RESEARCH STUDIES FROM THE DEPARTMENT.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 16

This report is in the process of being translated and will be made available to committee members upon completion of translation.

RECOMMENDATION 18

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IMPROVE REGISTRATION TRACKING PROCEDURES TO ENSURE THAT, AS PEOPLE LEAVE THE NWT, THEIR ELIGIBILITY FOR TERRITORIAL HEALTH INSURANCE CEASES.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 18

The department contacted provincial/territorial jurisdictions to review measures undertaken to improve the accuracy of health care registration files. Possible options for improving the NWT system include linking with provincial tracking systems and conducting public awareness campaigns.

The department issued renewal notices for health care cards for residents of the NWT in the Fall of 1993. An information campaign consisting of newspaper and radio advertisements was part of the renewal process. New health care cards will be issued in February and March 1994. Those names that were not submitted for renewal will be deleted from the active data base.

RECOMMENDATION 20

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH REVIEW PROCEDURES FOR THE RECOVERY OF ALL RECIPROCAL BILLINGS AND IMPLEMENT SPECIFIC ACTION TO RECOVER ANY OUTSTANDING PAYMENT WHICH IS OWING TO THE GNWT.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 20

When reciprocal billing was agreed to by federal/provincial/territorial Ministers of Health, it was acknowledged that to some degree there would be incorrect billings that provinces and territories would have to absorb. This was to ensure portability of benefits from one jurisdiction to another, as required by the *Canada Health Act*. The spirit of the reciprocal billing agreement and the cost of enforcement should also be considered when the department attempts to recover outstanding payments.

RECOMMENDATION 22

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH DEVELOP A PROCESS THROUGH WHICH SENIOR MANAGERS BECOME FAMILIAR WITH ACTIVITIES AND MANDATES OF OTHER DIVISIONS OR WITH BOARD ADMINISTRATION, INCLUDING, WHERE APPROPRIATE, THE TEMPORARY ROTATION OF OFFICIALS.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 22

The current process through which senior managers become familiar with activities and mandates of other divisions or with board administration begins with an adequate orientation and includes regular updates at senior management meetings. In addition, the department is actively encouraging the temporary rotation of senior officials at the board and headquarters levels through a short-term secondment process. To date, several such arrangements have been made:

- a) secondment of a senior health administration consultant to the Inuvik Regional Health Board as acting chief executive officer;
- b) secondment of a senior health administration consultant as the first full-time executive director of the NWT Health Care Association;
- c) secondment of a financial analyst to the finance section of the Mackenzie Regional Health Service for an eight-month period;
- d) secondment of a health administration consultant to the Kitikmeot Health Board as assistant executive director for a three-month period;
- e) secondment of the assistant director, financial analysis to the Inuvik Regional Health Board as the regional financial officer;
- f) the senior health administration consultant is currently acting as the interim administrator of H.H. Williams Memorial Hospital in Hay River;
- g) the nursing services division of the department has provided coverage for the regional nursing officer, Baffin Regional Health Board.

Short-term assignments of board staff to headquarters have to date been in relation to specific training programs, but other individual assignment opportunities will be developed.

RECOMMENDATION 24

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH WORK WITH THE HOSPITAL AND HEALTH BOARDS TO DEVELOP A PLAN BY JANUARY 1, 1994, FOR THE STANDARDIZATION OF BOARD ACCOUNTING SYSTEMS;

AND FURTHER, THAT THE DEPARTMENT AND BOARDS COMPLETE IMPLEMENTATION AND TRAINING FOR NEW SYSTEM COMPONENTS BY APRIL 1, 1994, AND COMPLETE A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF SYSTEM PERFORMANCE BY APRIL 1, 1995.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 24

The new health board financial system has been approved and will be implemented by Fall 1994. A training component will be included in the implementation process.

RECOMMENDATION 26

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ACCORD A HIGH PRIORITY TO FINAL DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAPITAL ASSETS TRACKING SYSTEM.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 26

The controllable assets tracking system (CATS) has been initiated in six of the eight health and hospital boards across the NWT. A strategy is in place to complete the implementation in the Kitikmeot and the Keewatin Regions in the fiscal year 1994/95.

RECOMMENDATION 28

THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PREPARE A COMPREHENSIVE REPORT ON WHICH DEFINITIVE OBJECTIVES HAVE BEEN MET SINCE 1988, AND INCLUDE A PLAN FOR MEETING ANY UNFULFILLED OBJECTIVES.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 28

A draft report has been prepared and will be presented to the Minister for his review before the end of the fiscal year 1993/94.

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