



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to
Committee Report 37-19(2): Report on the Review of the
2022 Audit of Addictions Prevention and Recovery Services**

The Standing Committee on Government Operations (SCOGO) reviewed the “Addictions Prevention and Recovery Services Work Plan (2022-2024)” and the “Addictions Prevention and Recovery Services in the Northwest Territories” audit report and provided their “Report on the Review of the 2022 Audit of Addictions Prevention and Recovery Services” (Report) on November 1, 2022.

The Report included 14 recommendations that reinforce accountability and request additional actions to improve programs and services that help Northerners avoid and heal from addictions. The Report was considered in Committee of the Whole on November 2, 2022, and a motion was carried for the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) to provide a response to the Report within 120 days.

The following is the GNWT’s formal response to the Report and the recommendations.

The GNWT thanks SCOGO for its review, engagement, and recommendations, which will inform ongoing work to improve addiction prevention and recovery services.

Recommendation 1: *That the Department of Health and Social Services review and relax administrative requirements to access the On the Land Healing Fund with a view to ensuring full uptake of budgeted funds in 2022-23, and report on whether the funds were dispersed.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees in principle with this recommendation. The Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) supports the delivery of culturally appropriate mental wellness and addictions recovery on the land programs that are specific to the needs of communities. The Department of HSS completed a process evaluation of the On the Land Healing Fund in 2021. Following this evaluation, the Department of HSS revised the application and reporting process which included the development of simplified forms for all Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery funds.

Adjustments were also made to the On the Land Healing Fund schedule of the *Grants and Contributions Policy* to reflect the importance of Indigenous healing practices and to expand eligible funds to include training for staff and capital costs on a case-by-case basis.

Virtual meetings are held with funding recipients to gather ongoing feedback and to provide an opportunity for relationship building and information sharing. They also provide an opportunity to see if the changes made as a result of the evaluation are working from their perspective.

To date in 2022-2023, \$1,535,335 of the \$1,824,850 for the On the Land Healing Fund has been allocated, with \$289,515 remaining. Funds are held specifically for Indigenous Governments from April 1-September 1 of each year. After September 1, any unallocated funds become accessible to community governing authorities and non-government organizations (NGOs). The Department of HSS has been actively promoting all the community support funds administered by the Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery Division including the On the Land Healing Fund.

On November 25, 2022, during a Council of Leaders meeting on Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery, the Minister of HSS committed to exploring options, including block funding, that would allow Indigenous Governments to access mental wellness and addictions recovery support funds more easily. The Department of HSS is currently in the process of exploring potential options with the intent of adjusting in time for funding disbursement in the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

Recommendation 2: *That the Government of the Northwest Territories increase funding for grants and contribution programs that target men's wellness.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees in principle with this recommendation. The Department of HSS currently administers several funds focused on community wellness and mental wellness and addictions recovery. These funds support Indigenous Governments and community organizations to deliver programming specifically targeted to the needs of their communities, as identified by them.

Department of HSS staff work with communities to determine eligible activities and help develop proposals; however, decisions about community-based programming and target populations are made at the discretion of the Indigenous Government or community organization.

Current funding available that could support programming specifically targeting men's wellness includes:

- Healthy Choices Fund
- Addictions Recovery and Aftercare Fund
- On the Land Healing Fund
- Addictions Recovery Peer Support Fund
- Community Suicide Prevention Fund

- Community Wellness Initiatives Funding

Recommendation 3: *That the Department of Health and Social Services, in consultation with Indigenous Governments and by Spring 2023, sponsor a Men's Wellness Conference. The conference should focus on hearing, learning, and sharing about the root causes of issues facing some men, such as racism, trauma, isolation, violence, and addictions.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees in principle with this recommendation. The Department of HSS's Community, Culture and Innovation Division hosted a Territorial Wellness Gathering of community wellness workers from December 13-15, 2022, to bring together the community wellness initiative network, share health status and wellness priority updates, and support community capacity for effective wellness planning. During the Territorial Wellness Gathering, the Arctic Youth Collective hosted a panel session on *Strategic Partnerships for Youth and Indigenous Men's Wellness* which addressed mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous youth and Indigenous men. Presenters shared the importance of community connection and culturally relevant programming. The Department of HSS will provide funding to organizations to support gatherings for Indigenous youth and men to be delivered in 2023.

The Department of HSS is currently planning the Weaving Our Wisdom gathering in 2024 and Indigenous Governments have been invited to assign interested staff to the organizing committee. The goal is to have this Committee established in early 2023. Key findings from the Indigenous youth and Indigenous men's gatherings funded in 2023 will be shared during the Weaving Our Wisdom gathering.

Recommendation 4: *That the Department of Health and Social Services, in collaboration with the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, add an eighth priority area to the Addictions Prevention and Recovery Workplan focusing on people aged 29 and under. This priority area should include clear commitments and performance measures to:*

- *Increase access to and uptake in counselling and healing supports; and*
- *Increase youth participation in sports and recreation, including measures to improve access to facilities and programming.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees in principle with this recommendation. The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) supports the Committee's recommendation to increase youth participation in sport and recreation programs.

MACA provides broad strategic direction for sport, recreation, and physical activity programming in the NWT, which is supported through the investment of contributions to territorial, regional and community NGOs, as well as community governments. Collectively, these organizations deliver a range of community-based programs that all age categories in a community can access.

To help improve access to sports, recreation, and physical activity, MACA is working closely with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to encourage community governments and education authorities to develop and implement more Joint Use Agreements, which are intended to increase the usage of community infrastructure by user groups. As user groups gain more access to the infrastructure needed to provide their programming, there should be a resulting increase in recreational and physical activities being provided at the community level.

MACA's ability to measure the extent to which access to facilities and programming is increasing participation across the NWT is limited, because MACA does not provide the access directly and the funding provided through MACA is not the only funding source that user groups receive across the NWT. Further, to ask user groups to report on increased access and participation would impose additional reporting requirements on the organizations who deliver this programming; adding an additional administrative burden on already tapped resources at the community level. MACA does report on the number and type of physical activities that were offered as a result of the contributions it provides. This is done through MACA's annual report on the Western Canada Lottery Fund. For physical activity rates, MACA generally relies on national data collection methods that support tracking of physical activity rates (i.e., Canadian Fitness Lifestyle Research Institute, ParticipAction, Statistics Canada – Canadian Community Health Survey).

MACA's goal remains to work with and support the delivery of quality programming to youth without adding additional reporting and administrative requirements, which effectively erodes the ability of NGOs and community governments to deliver programming.

HSS staff often partner with community organizations or host events to create enhanced awareness of the various programs and services available. These partnerships help to build trust and break down barriers, facilitating access to, and uptake in counselling and healing supports.

Recommendation 5: *That the Department of Health and Social Services implement an approach to measure whether users and non-users of GNWT addictions services find those services to be culturally safe and provide a timeline for implementation.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees with this recommendation and the *Addictions Prevention and Recovery Work Plan* (Work Plan) has been updated to reflect this. The Department of HSS is combining the Community Counselling Program Service-User Satisfaction Questionnaire and the Addictions Recovery Experiences Survey into a single Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery Experiences Questionnaire that includes additional demographic categories. This new questionnaire will include feedback from both users and non-users of GNWT addictions services and will incorporate additional questions regarding cultural safety.

The questionnaire will be administered across NWT using a mixed method (online and paper-based) and repeated every 2-3 years. Additional strategies will be employed to encourage participation from both users and non-users. The combined questionnaire will be administered January 1 to February 29, 2024. Results will be used to inform understanding of the addictions services needs of diverse subpopulations.

As of January 16, 2023, the newly established Office of Client Experience at the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority (NTHSSA) began to provide services. This new office will provide support to all residents and guests of the Northwest Territories accessing HSS programs and services. This includes residents and guests who access care and services from the Department of HSS, the NTHSSA, the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority, and the Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency. This office offers a centralized intake process where individuals can contact the office to make a complaint, provide a compliment, or bring questions regarding the health and social services system. Services include health advocacy to ensure Indigenous people receive equitable care and services. The staff team includes a Client Experience Liaison, System Navigators, and four Indigenous Patient Advocates. The Advocates support Indigenous residents and guests in the NWT's Acute Care Facilities. The availability of the Advocates to support other facilities and regions will initially depend on capacity and demand, which will be tracked to inform future requests for program expansion if needed. Through the Office of Client Experience, the Advocates will do their best to provide a service to all who request it. The Advocates are physically located in the following centres:

1. Stanton Territorial Hospital
2. Inuvik Regional Hospital
3. Hay River Health Centre
4. Fort Smith Health Centre

Additionally, the Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery Division has an ongoing relationship with the Indigenous Advisory Body and the Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery Advisory Group (MWAR AG). Both groups provide feedback and guidance on Department of HSS initiatives and, in the case of the MWAR AG, provide an opportunity to hear directly from individuals with living and lived expertise.

At a national level, the Department of HSS continues to participate in the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) Anti-Racism Advisory Circle, and in the National Dialogue series on Anti-Indigenous Racism in Canada's Health Systems. The most recent Dialogue session, held in January 2023, focused on exploring opportunities for a national data strategy and measurement framework for anti-Indigenous racism and cultural safety across distinctions in Canada's health systems.

Recommendation 6: *That the Government of the Northwest Territories conduct a whole-of-government review of cultural safety in all standards and policies associated with GNWT programs and services and provide a timeline for implementation. This review should identify barriers to cultural safety to inform efforts to remove or reduce identified barriers.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees in principle with this recommendation. As outlined in the Work Plan, the Department of HSS will be conducting a review of addictions standards and procedures including the Community Counselling Program and the Facility Based Addictions Treatment Program to identify barriers and improve cultural safety. This work will include engagement with the Department of HSS's Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Division and the Indigenous Advisory Body.

The Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Division is also developing a Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Guide that will function as a lens for HSS staff as they develop internal and external Department of HSS documents, including programs and policies. The guide also intends to build capacity among Department of HSS staff to critically reflect about the ways in which Indigenous peoples and knowledge are reflected in documents.

The *Work Plan* also reflects that work will be done to implement changes to reduce barriers and share results with all Health and Social Services Authorities to direct complementary changes to operational policies and procedures, including a recognition of the value of Indigenous knowledge.

The Department of HSS would be pleased to share resources and tools with other Departments should they wish to undertake similar policy changes.

Recommendation 7: *That the Department of Health and Social Services and Health and Social Services Authorities, in collaboration with the Department of Finance, prioritize their commitment to revise hiring practices for addictions positions to recognize the value of Indigenous qualifications. Committee further recommends the timeline for this work to be moved up by six months, to 2023-24 Q2.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees in principle with this recommendation. In July 2022, the Department of Finance launched the [Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Job Description Review Guide](#). This guide will be used in the review of these positions to ensure Indigenous social and cultural factors are considered in descriptions of these positions. As indicated in the Indigenous Employment Plans for the Department of HSS and NTHSSA, publicly launched in November 2022, the Department of HSS plans to review 15% of job descriptions in the 2022/2023 fiscal year and 35% of job descriptions in the 2023/2024 fiscal year; the NTHSSA plans to review 8% of job descriptions in the 2022/23 fiscal year and 15% of job descriptions in the 2023/24 fiscal year. The Department of HSS and NTHSSA have already started this work and will incorporate these positions into those targets.

Recommendation 8: *That the Department of Health and Social Services and Health and Social Services Authorities review and adjust standards of practice to recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge and provide a timeline for implementation.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees in principle with this recommendation. As part of the *Work Plan*, the Department of HSS has committed to reviewing standards and procedures with a lens to identifying barriers to access and cultural safety. This work will occur in partnership with the Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Division and the Indigenous Advisory Body.

As outlined in the response to Recommendation 6, the Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Division will develop a Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Guide that will function as a lens for HSS staff as they develop internal and external HSS documents, including programs and standards. The guide also intends to build capacity among HSS staff to critically reflect about the ways in which Indigenous peoples and knowledge are reflected in documents.

After this work has been completed, the Health and Social Services Authorities will be better able to review their Standards of Practice to recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge using the Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Guide.

Recommendation 9: *That the Department of Health and Social Services and Health and Social Services Authorities set up a distinct method for frontline staff to identify barriers to care and cultural safety or propose better practices and policies on an ongoing basis and provide a timeline for implementation.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees with this recommendation. The Department of HSS's Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism division is establishing a Community of Practice for HSS Indigenous employees, to provide a supportive peer network, raise issues, and share innovations to address anti-Indigenous racism.

Recommendation 10: *That the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) collect and analyze data from residents who do not use GNWT addictions prevention and recovery services, to identify creative ways to remove barriers and make services more culturally safe and provide a timeline for implementation.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees with this recommendation and the Department of HSS has updated the Work Plan accordingly. Changes reflected in response to Recommendation #5.

Recommendation 11: *That the Government of the Northwest Territories, in collaboration with Indigenous Governments, pursue federal funding to help set up healing centres in the Northwest Territories.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees with this recommendation in principle. The Minister of HSS has initiated conversations with Indigenous Governments to determine how best to support the mental wellness needs of NWT residents. These conversations with Indigenous Governments will be instrumental in helping to determine what new approaches could be taken within our system as well as in partnership with Indigenous Governments and communities to ensure robust supports are available to residents. Next steps will be informed by the outcomes of engagement with Indigenous Governments.

Recommendation 12: *That the Department of Health and Social Services present performance measures for each activity in the Addictions Prevention and Recovery Workplan and provide a timeline for implementation. The Department should report on progress with:*

- *A web-based tracker, similar to ECE's Action Plan to Improve Student Outcomes Progress Tracker, on a quarterly basis; and*
- *A public briefing at Committee, in spring/summer 2023 before the 19th Assembly ends.*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees with this recommendation. The Department of HSS is in the process of creating a progress tracker based off the design used by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment's (ECE) Web based tracker for their Action Plan to Improve Student Outcomes Progress Tracker.

The Addictions Prevention and Recovery Services Work Plan Tracker will demonstrate progress towards the *Work Plan's* expected results and will be updated quarterly.

In Spring 2023, the Department of HSS will provide a public briefing to Committee on progress to-date.

Recommendation 13: *That the Department of Health and Social Services make changes to its Addictions Prevention and Recovery Workplan as soon as possible to reflect the recommendations contained in this Committee report (Report on the Review of the 2022 Audit of Addictions Prevention and Recovery Services).*

GNWT Response:

The GNWT agrees with this recommendation. Updates have been made to the Work Plan

Recommendation 14: *The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to this report within 120 days.*

GNWT Response:

This document constitutes the Government of the Northwest Territories' response in accordance with the Recommendation.