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Minister's Forum on Health and Social Services

The Minister of Health and Social Services would like your views on the future of the NWT Health and Social Services system.

Why conduct a review?

In June, 1998 the Department of Health and Social Services released 'Shaping Our Future', a strategic plan for health and wellness. The Plan provides general directions for guiding future changes to the health and social services system. A number of factors are driving costs and increasing demands on the system. Unless the overall fiscal forecast changes significantly, it is unlikely that there will be major funding increases in the next budget. We need to ensure that our health and social services system continues to provide the best care possible, in all NWT communities, not just today, but in the future.

What will the review focus on?

'Shaping Our Future' outlines several key directions aimed at improving the health and social service system and improving overall health and wellbeing. The directions for improving the system focus on four specific areas, *Governing the System*, *Human Resources*, *Financial Sustainability*, and, *Program and Service Delivery*. The Minister's Forum will focus on these key areas and will provide information to the public on key cost drivers and current challenges. We need to make informed decisions today to ensure that our system is sustainable in the long term.

How will the review be conducted?

The Minister will appoint a forum of 6-8 people to consult with the general public, professional organizations, aboriginal organizations and other key stakeholder groups. Nominations will be sought from MLA's, Boards, Aboriginal organizations and the public. The Forum will include a balance of members from across the NWT, lay-people and professionals.

The Minister's forum will conduct one meeting in each constituency of the NWT. In the case of constituencies with more than one community, arrangements will be made for elected representatives from other communities in the constituency to attend. MLA's will be asked to recommend a community within their constituency to host the meeting.

Community meetings will have a "workshop" format where participants will be discuss key questions on the four key areas outlined above. There will be opportunities for professional associations, non-governmental organizations and others to provide submissions or presentations to the Forum.

The review will conclude with a meeting of all stakeholder groups in the fall, when the findings of the earlier public meetings will be presented and discussed. The outcome of this meeting will form the basis of the final report and recommendations.

When will the review take place?

Public meetings will be held throughout June and July of 1999. The final meeting will take place in the fall, with the final report and recommendations being forwarded to the Minister for consideration.

How do I get more information?

Additional information is available from the Department of Health and Social Services, Government of the Northwest Territories and/or your Health and Social Services Board.

Minister's Forum on Health and Social Services

Terms of Reference

Introduction

In 1992, the Legislative Assembly initiated the Special Committee on Health and Social Services. One of the primary recommendations from the Special Committee was for the GNWT to consolidate the Department of Health and the Department of Social Services. The objective of consolidation was to reduce overlap and foster greater program integration. In June 1994 the Departments of Social Services and Health were amalgamated and work began on the consolidation.

The Special Committee also identified a number of issues that the new Department would have to address. In an effort to meet these challenges and some of the root causes of health and social problems, the Department collaborated with the public, boards, professional groups and nonprofit associations. Health & Social Services Boards each undertook extensive consultations in their respective communities. In addition, the Department commissioned the Med-Emerg Group to conduct a comprehensive review of the health and social services system. As a result of these consultations and the information gathered from the Med-Emerg report, the Department of Health & Social Services released "Shaping Our Future: A Strategic Plan for Health and Wellness" in June 1998.

As the Department of Health & Social Services implements the Strategic Plan, it is necessary to ensure the Department works within its limited resources to sustain the highest level of care possible.

Background

The health and social services system is facing significant challenges. The expectations of the public have never been higher and the resources available within the system are extremely limited. As such, existing resources are not keeping pace with increased demands for services.

The Strategic Plan outlined several key directions aimed at improving the system and improving health and wellbeing. The directions for improving the system focussed on: governing the system, human resources, financial sustainability, and program and service delivery. These directions will form the basis of the review.

Governing the System

Under the current system of governance, there are nine (9) health and social services boards in the NWT. Primarily these boards deliver health and social service programs to a specific region or community. Some boards also provide services on a Territorial basis (e.g. Stanton). These boards are:

- Inuvik Regional Health & Social Services Board
- Deh Cho Regional Health & Social Services Board
- Dogrib Community Services Board
- Yellowknife Health & Social Services Board
- Stanton Regional Health Board
- Fort Smith Health & Social Services Board
- Hay River Community Health Board
- Deninu Health & Social Services Board
- Lutsel K'e Dene Band

There will be significant changes to public government over the next few years. The system of health and social services will be shaped by these changes. There is an opportunity to organize the system in a way that better reflects the needs and values of people in NWT. The size and number of public institutions must be appropriate for the size and make-up of our population. These institutions should reflect the best way to deliver and manage services.

A number of administrative and operational issues have come to the forefront. There is currently no governance structure that has a clear mandate to administer Territorial facilities such as addiction treatment facilities, children's' facilities, or elders' facilities. Some services have become fragmented, some boards lack effective clinical supervision and some services have suffered a loss of economies of scale. This has put an additional strain upon the limited financial resources funding the system. It is critical that agencies work together so people get the services they need.

The sustainability of the current system is a significant concern. Not all services can be provided in all communities. For many services, there are simply too few people to maintain service quality and keep costs affordable. Many of the smaller Boards are struggling to meet the continued demand for programs and services. This pattern is unlikely to change and the GNWT will not have sufficient resources available to meet such demands in the future without realising the economies of scale necessary to operate an efficient health and social service system.

Human Resources

The recruitment and retention of doctors, nurses and social workers is an issue across Canada and is particularly urgent in the NWT. Each of the nine boards across the NWT is struggling to attract health and social service providers to their region. The Department has initiated a comprehensive Recruitment and Retention Strategy but there is still a significant role for the communities to play in offering positive working and living conditions to help retain health and social service providers.

There is a need to create stability in our workforce. There is also a need to increase the number of Northerners qualified to fill health and social services positions. Quality care can only be achieved when all workers are familiar with the communities they serve and the system they are working in.

Workers' roles and scopes of practice should reflect the working conditions unique to the NWT. The isolated working conditions for many frontline workers mean these employees need to be able to handle a broad range of issues and problems. These workers must have the skills, knowledge and training to respond to a wide range of health and social needs.

Financial Sustainability

Health and social services are expensive, especially in the North, and they cost more each year. More people are using services more often. Meanwhile, the population is growing and ageing while the resources have stabilized which means the demands are outpacing the government's ability to respond. Information regarding the costs that are driving the system needs to be shared with the public. Consensus is required to make the changes and choices necessary to ensure that services are there for the future.

A priority of the territorial government is to make sure programs and services are affordable and sustainable. The health and social services system must be structured so that people receive the care they need in the most effective way. Funding needs to be managed wisely and fairly so all core services are delivered and service quality is kept at the highest level possible.

The department needs to improve the process of allocating resources for health and social services across the Territories. Funding to boards should reflect the populations they serve, both in terms of their characteristics and needs. The method of setting funding levels should be fair and understandable. Funding needs to be adequate, predictable and sustainable. Financial responsibilities should match service delivery and management responsibilities.

Program & Service Delivery

Problems with service coordination and integration can mean service delivery is fragmented. It can also mean gaps in service. It is also necessary to build on the strengths of the system and share best practices.

The system focuses mostly on providing treatment and responding to crisis. Data indicates the increased incidence of preventable illnesses and conditions such as FAS/E and tobacco related illnesses. Many health and social problems, and demands on the system could be greatly reduced if they could be avoided or detected at an early stage. It is important to balance the focus on treatment by emphasizing promotion, prevention and early intervention services. There is a need to ensure partners work towards greater wellness through their policies and programs.

Everyone wants to have the best possible services to prevent, detect and treat health and social problems. The Department is interested in setting and maintaining high standards for all services. There is also a need to improve the effectiveness of these services. This may mean changing or creating services so they reflect need better or are more culturally appropriate. It may also mean finding ways to improve collaboration between workers, agencies and communities.

Scope

The review will focus on the directions in the Department's Strategic Plan related to improving the system: Governing the System; Human Resources; Financial Resources; and Program and Service Delivery.

Governing the System

- clarifying roles and responsibilities of Department, boards, private service providers and nonprofit organizations
- promoting strong relationships between the government, boards and communities

Human Resources

- creating a stable, northern workforce with increased competencies
- developing the role and scope of northern frontline professions in health and social fields

Financial Sustainability

- create a sustainable system with necessary economies of scale that allows effective community and/or regional governance
- fair and equitable allocation of financial resources

Program and Service Delivery

- remove gaps and duplication in delivery of programs and services and increase integration and improve coordination of services
- support greater emphasis on prevention and health promotion
- improve quality of programs and services through evaluation and sharing of best practices

The Strategic Plan describes key outcomes of an improved, efficient and effective system. The Minister's Forum will seek input regarding the communities' role in the process of how we achieve the defined outcomes.

Process

Minister's Forum

The Minister will appoint a Minister's Forum of 6-8 people to consult with the general public, professional groups and nonprofit associations on the above issues. MLA's and Aboriginal Organizations will be requested to nominate individuals with past experience in the health and social services system (as a frontline worker, governance role, or as an advocate). Current Health and Social Services Trustees, Department & Board staff will be considered ineligible to ensure the Minister's Forum is as objective as possible. The Minister's Forum will represent a broad cross-section of the NWT population: geographically, professionally, and politically.

Consultation

The Minister's Forum will travel to and consult with one community in each constituency. Each MLA will be asked to identify the appropriate community in their constituency. Arrangements shall be made to ensure elected representatives from other communities in the constituency attend the meetings.

The meetings will take a 'workshop' format. An official from the Regional Health & Social Services Board or the Department will make a brief presentation on the "state of the system" and review current trends and cost drivers. Meeting participants will be presented with focussed questions and asked to formulate recommendations to the Minister's Forum members.

The Minister's Forum will be asked to develop a process to ensure an appropriate level of input from professional groups and nonprofit organization.

The Minister's Forum will host a final meeting which will be held in October. Delegates from across the NWT will be invited to hear the results of community meetings and be given the opportunity to comment upon the findings.

Communication

Extensive communication will be necessary to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to prepare and submit recommendations to the Minister's Forum. A website will be developed so people can submit their comments and access the latest information regarding the Minister's Forum. Radio and newspaper advertisements will notify the public of the location and the dates of the community meetings and stress the importance of their attendance and input.

Outputs

The Minister's Forum will prepare a final report and submit their recommendations on improving the system and potential delivery models to the Minister of Health & Social Services in November 1999.

Timeframe

Recommendations to be delivered to Legislative Assembly by December 1999.

