

Government of
Northwest Territories

July 30, 2024

SHAUNA MORGAN
MLA, YELLOWKNIFE NORTH**Oral Question 297-20(1): Wellness and Addictions Recommendations**

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on June 13, 2024, regarding *The Minister's Forum on Addictions and Community Wellness: Healing Voices, April 30, 2013*. Specifically, you asked if the Department had addressed the recommendations made in the Healing Voices Report.

As you will know, the Minister's Forum consisted of 12 members who traveled to 21 communities to listen to northerners about what they felt were the best ways to stop destructive impacts of alcohol, drugs, and other addictions on communities. The Healing Voices Report included valuable feedback from community members that was then organized into recommendations.

Of the 67 recommendations made, the Government of the Northwest Territories accepted 59 recommendations. As requested by the Member, the attached list provides an update on recommendation 7, 11, 29, and 54 for which the Department of Health and Social Services has responsibility.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lesa Semmler".

Lesa Semmler
Minister of Health and Social Services

Attachment

- c. Principal Secretary
Deputy Secretary, Premier's Office
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Director, Legislative Affairs and House Planning

Recommendations	Update
<p>7. Incorporate more information about addictions and the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol into school curriculums.</p>	<p>My Voice, My Choice – provides youth with information that aims to positively impact their personal choices and behaviours related to mental wellness.</p> <p>The Department of Health and Social Services had implemented My Voice, My Choice - a social marketing campaign that aims to reduce the harmful impacts of alcohol and other drug use among NWT youth. In 2013 to 2015, the Department worked with a contractor to increase healthy choices by NWT youth aged 13-18 around alcohol and drugs. This focus was expanded in 2014 to include tobacco choices, and in 2015, it was further expanded to include healthy choices in relation to relationships, sexuality, eating and physical and mental wellness. To reach a large, territory-wide youth audience, a weekly radio program, entitled <i>Feel Real Radio</i>, was added and featured NWT youth talking about the issues they face and strategies for making positive choices in their lives and communities. The show included music, interviews with NWT youth, and contests. The website was also expanded, and social media presence was strengthened and, in 2015, youth empowerment workshops were also added. An evaluation indicated that the My Voice My Choice campaign was not reaching its intended audience as at least 75% of its audience was over the age of 18 and about 45% were older than 25.</p> <p>The campaign had been dormant as of March 2015 but was then renamed to the My Voice My Choice Campaign for Youth Wellness. The Department worked with a contractor to develop a wellness box campaign for youth with each box themed to be on NWT youth-identified topics including Sexual Health, Health Relationships, Healthy Coping, Self-Harm and Suicide Prevention, Substance Use and Mental Health, and Taking Care of our Land. Each box includes local resources, information, creative activities, and supplies that encourage theme exploration. There were boxes for individuals as well as boxes for youth service organizations that include a facilitator’s guide with lessons and activities to be done with a group of youth. The first box was distributed March 28, 2022, and the remaining five boxes were distributed over the course of 2022-2023 on a first come first served basis. The overall objective of the wellness boxes is to empower youth mental wellness in creative and engaging ways that support connection, relationships, and discussion. The hope is that youth and facilitators go beyond the content in a meaningful way where mental wellness is improved among children, youth, and families.</p> <p>Based on feedback and lessons learned from the initial roll out of boxes plans were made in 2023-2024 that focused on including a higher number of facilitator boxes on one theme and distributing these boxes to youth serving organizations. Work was done to reach out to youth serving organizations (including schools, youth centers etc.) across the NWT to determine their interest in receiving boxes and in 2023-2024 1000 Sexual Health boxes were distributed to youth serving organizations across the NWT.</p>

Under the Safe Schools regulations, schools are required to offer evidence based healthy relationship programming. While the program can be chosen by each school, the Department of Education, Culture, and Employment supports annual training for all NWT educators in evidence-based healthy relationships programming in partnership with Western University's Center for School of Mental Health. Programs include: The Fourth R (Grades 7-9), Healthy Relationships Plus Program (Grades 10-11), and Gender Sexuality Alliance (SGA)/Healthy Relationships Program (HRP) for 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth. These programs include content related to the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol and address adolescent risky behaviours by focusing on relationship knowledge and skills and understanding challenges that influence decision-making around such topics as violence/bullying, unsafe sexual behaviour, and substance use.

Fourth R Programs and related HRPP (Healthy Relationships Plus Programming): These programs address adolescent risky behaviours by focusing on relationship goals and challenges that influence their decision-making around such topics as violence/bullying, unsafe sexual behaviour, and substance use.

In the draft NWT Adapted Health curriculum, topics related to addiction and the harmful impacts of drugs and alcohol are covered. All the curricula are still in the process of adaptation and will be until 2027. The Grades 4, 5, 6 and 9 curricula were trialed in the 2023-24 year and Grades 7 and 8 will begin in schools in 2024-2025. The work to adapt the BC Grade 1-3 Health curriculum for the NWT context has begun.

From Grades 4-9, in the Draft NWT adapted Health curricula, students explore possibilities for healthy choices which influence their physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. These possibilities include awareness of the negative influences of drug and alcohol on all aspects of wellbeing.

Students are expected to be able to do the following:

- Identify and describe factors that influence healthy choices
- Assess and evaluate strategies for managing problems related to mental wellbeing and substance use

Students are expected to know content including:

- Strategies for managing personal and social risks relative to psychoactive substances and potentially addictive behaviours (Psychoactive substances are defined in the curricula)
- Media and social influences related to psychoactive substance use and potentially addictive behaviours
- Physical, emotional, mental health and social aspects of psychoactive substance use and potentially addictive behaviours

The Department has supported the NWT Health Adapted Curriculum by providing \$330,000 between 2018 and 2019.

<p>11. Review and revise existing processes within the health and social services system for referring youth to treatment in order to ensure that treatment is accessible for all youth.</p>	<p>Work had initially been started to implement screening tools to support the early identification of risky or problematic alcohol use. While this would help to ensure a consistent and standardized approach to early intervention there have been questions about the cultural appropriateness approach and this work was paused. The appropriateness of this approach is now being considered as part of the Alcohol Strategy.</p> <p>The Government of the Northwest Territories contracts a variety of out—of-territory (OOT) specialized services for children and youth when their needs cannot be met in the NWT. For a comprehensive list and description of these contracted resources, please visit the following website: www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/treatment-resources-nwt-children-youth-and-families.</p> <p>Several enhancements have been made to the OOT Specialized Service Program, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlined review and processing of applications; • Implemented an annual in-person audit process for all OOT operations; • Better support and monitoring of children and youth through the consistent assignment of courtesy workers in the receiving jurisdictions; and • Enhancements to standards. <p>The number of children/youths in out-of-territory specialized services supported through an Individual/Group Treatment Program has decreased over the last five years from 40 children/youth in 2019-2020 to 19 children/youth in 2023-2024.</p> <p>As outlined in the Child, Youth, and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan (2023-2028), the NTHSSA piloted a cultural wellness camp for Youth with complex needs in November and December 2023. The pilot project included two 14-day Camps for youth aged 12-18 years followed by three months of individualized, community-based aftercare support.</p> <p>Next Steps:</p> <p>We will continue to examine opportunities to re-align and coordinate services to reduce the number of children and youth requiring support outside the NWT as well as opportunities to repatriate children and youth back to the NWT.</p> <p>The cultural wellness camp for youth pilot project was completed in March 2024. An evaluation is currently underway and findings, along with guidance from the Indigenous Advisory Body and NTHSSA Leadership Council will inform next steps.</p>
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	<p>In 2024-2025, the Department will be issuing a Canada-wide RFP process for contracted specialized services for children, youth, and families when they require services that exceed what is offered in the NWT. The RFP process will include a priority of specialized services, including supporting and maintaining cultural connections.</p>
<p>29. Introduce media campaigns that profile individuals and communities who are successfully dealing with addictions.</p>	<p>The Department of Health and Social Services has created a variety of video resources that specifically profile northerners who are working to address their challenges with addictions and mental health.</p> <p>The Department created videos which focuses on individuals in recovery that are highlighted during the annual NWT Addictions Awareness Week such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol Recovery: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=li_sDgbw5I • Donald Prince: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8YTXesy4_Y • You're Not Alone Video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mrz5l64r3c <p>Breaking from Addiction – A story of recovery video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BytxnG5f7Qw&t=47s)</p> <p>EHN WAGON App: NWT resident sharing their experience using the EHN WAGON virtual aftercare app. EHN Wagon App - YouTube</p> <p>We Need to Talk about this Stuff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videos specifically addressing stigma and the importance of being able to talk about substance use and mental health. The videos feature northerners talking about various substance use and mental health topics. We Need to Talk about this Stuff Health and Social Services (gov.nt.ca) • Work is underway to develop an additional video in 2024-2025 <p>As part of the upcoming Toxic Drug Awareness Campaign (Fall 2024) there will be a video series that features northerns sharing the impacts of street drugs on NWT residents, including individuals who use or have used substances and their immediate families. While not all of the stories will be of hope, as the intention is to help people see this as a broader community issue (not just one focused on visible homelessness), there will be some stories that about addiction recovery.</p> <p>The video resources are posted on the Department's public website year-round and are also periodically shared via Facebook or other social media as appropriate.</p>
<p>54. Encourage interagency groups to meet on the land once per year.</p>	<p>DHSS, Community, Culture and Innovation division (formerly known as Indigenous Health and Community Wellness Division) held a number of Community Healthy Living Fairs across the NWT. While these were not</p>

held on the land, they were held in a number of communities and brought together a variety of helping agencies and resources.

The Community, Culture and Innovation division (CCI) and the Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery division contribute funding to the On the Land Collaborative Fund. CCI also administer the Community Wellness Initiatives for communities to determine wellness priorities which often support land base programming.

In addition, the Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery Division administers the Community Wellness and Addictions Recovery Fund. This fund was previously three distinct funds (the On the Land Healing Fund, the Addictions Recovery Peer Support Fund and the Addictions Recovery Aftercare Fund) but was combined into one overarching fund that prioritizes Indigenous governments, helps to reduce administrative burden and provides Indigenous governments with enhanced flexibility to identify priorities and allocate funding. The programs implemented by Indigenous Governments often support land-based programming.

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/community-wellness-and-addictions-recovery-fund>