



January 17, 2025

ROBERT HAWKINS
MLA, YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

Return to Oral Question 348-20(1): Healthcare Services

In follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on October 23, 2024, regarding access to physician appointments, the following information is provided.

To provide some context, not all health care services are delivered by physicians. Our health service delivery system model related to delivery of primary care services is nurse-led. In this model, physicians have a consultative role. Depending on location, residents may initially access a Community Health Nurse, a Licensed Practice Nurse, or Nurse Practitioner who will assess the health issue and, if treatment or further investigation is required, will be referred to a physician. That said, when making an appointment for health services, the intake reception will ask what services are being sought and, if those requested services are within the physician's scope of practice, an appointment is made with a physician.

With a small population dispersed over 33 communities, it is not possible to have a full-service compliment of health care providers in each community. Physician services are located in the areas with a sufficient population to sustain those services. For example, most physicians also work in other areas such as Obstetrics, Emergency Room, Oncology, etc. and these functions which are the exclusive scope of physicians are prioritized over Primary Care Clinic time that can mostly be delivered by nursing scopes of practice. For residents living in small communities, access to physician services means having to either travel to Yellowknife, Inuvik or Hay River to access available physician services or wait for the scheduled physician visit to the community. Physician services may be accessed through same day services depending on available openings at the Yellowknife Primary Care Clinic; immediately in the case of an emergency through Stanton Territorial and Inuvik Hospitals' emergency departments; or may take weeks to months depending on the nature of follow-up or type of appointment required.

The delivery of health care is complex thus, to reliably state a timeframe for access to services is difficult considering all the factors at play with each case. At initial intake, providing the reason for an appointment determines what health care provider is best positioned to provide services. In general, should a resident be seeking an appointment for primary care services, they may see someone more quickly if the reason for the visit can be addressed by a Community Health Nurse, a Licensed Practice Nurse, or Nurse Practitioner. These appointments can usually be booked within 1-2 weeks maximum, but people can often be seen the same day if needed.

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In Yellowknife, the Primary Care Clinic's current average maximum wait time to see a physician is 53 days. This is a standard wait time measure when the first and second available appointments could not be booked but third next available appointment is booked. (Average max time is 53 days if you did not accept the first two suggested bookings.) Since the move to the Łıwegòatı Building, efforts have been made to increase locum coverage to create as much consistency as possible, topping up the coverage to a goal of three practitioners available on each team, Monday to Friday, as well as maintaining same day access at the downtown clinic.

Thank you.



Lesa Semmler
Minister, Health and Social Services

- c. Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Director, Legislative Affairs and House Planning