

THE HONOURABLE DIANE THOM  
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**Virtual Care**

Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to Written Question asked by the Member for Kam Lake on May 26, 2020 regarding Virtual Care.

As noted previously, the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority has set up a COVID-19 Virtual Care initiative. It would be incorrect, however, to perpetuate the assumption that because we are conducting Virtual Care during COVID-19 that we have incorporated recommendations from the Virtual Task Force Report.

We immediately deployed virtual care capacity to meet the urgent needs of the pandemic and limit an initial viral outbreak. This included setting up virtual visits by phone and expansion of video-conferencing, as well as remote access to the Electronic Medical Records. A second phase is currently being planned and will add secure messaging between health care providers and patients, and potentially between the Northwest Territories “NWT” and Alberta.

The Department of Health and Social Services will continue to explore the many aspects of virtual care post-COVID-19. We may consider the Virtual Task Force Report recommendations going forward. However, there will need to be extensive consideration and collaboration amongst Provinces and Territories to advance a virtual care model that can address both cross-jurisdictional provisions of services,

as well as services provided within the NWT. The work required to address each of the barriers noted is not known at this time, however it is likely a multi-year process. We will need to align investments, policy, and care delivery to support virtual care longer term, using the COVID-19 Virtual Care response to inform and guide future direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.