Government of   Gouvernement des
Northwest Territories   Territoires du Nord-Ouest

DEC 1 1 2020

RYLUND JOHNSON
MLA, YELLOWKNIFE NORTH

Oral Question 415-19(2): Zoonotics

This letter is in follow up to the Oral Question you raised on October 27, 2020 regarding Zoonotics.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) supports a lay vaccination program in communities that do not have access to permanent or visiting veterinary services. The number of people involved in this program has varied over time based on interest. A current list of lay vaccinators is not available as the training component has been inactive this past year. This has not prevented access to the vaccine, as the Department of Health and Social Services (Department) distributes vaccine product to communities based on request. Upon receipt of a request, the Department confirms that the following criteria are met:

1. The community where the vaccine will be used does not have local veterinarian services;
2. Details about the vaccination activity are provided, including vaccine quantity;
3. The person(s) has experience or has been trained in handling vaccine product and administering the vaccine to dogs; and
4. No charge will be incurred for administering the vaccine (i.e. provides an assurance this is a not-for-profit service).

The Department is aware that there are a number of private and not-for-profit veterinarians and/or programs that are providing animal health services to Northwest Territories (NWT) communities. It is not clear how these private veterinary services are currently distributed across the NWT, and the Department does not have a mandate to define or monitor these services.

The Department has initiated a discussion with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) and Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) on animal health services in the NWT. As I indicated to you in the House, the Department's interest in domestic animal health relates to potential implications for human health, particularly for potential for transmission of zoonotics from domestic animals to humans. ENR has an active wildlife health program, and has an interest in transmission of diseases between domestic and wild animals. ENR has a dedicated wildlife veterinarian who manages this program, and also serves as Chief Veterinary Officer. The *Dog Act* is administered by MACA given the important role that municipal governments have in dog control.

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In addition to these agencies, the emergence of an agriculture sector in the NWT requires that there be animal health services for livestock and fowl. This was identified as a need during the development of the NWT Agriculture Strategy. Through this strategy, there has been preliminary discussion on the potential needs for veterinary services for the agriculture sector, as well as ways to minimize potential impacts on wildlife health. The Department will raise the question of domestic animal health services with ENR and Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI) as part of the discussion about improving access to veterinary services for NWT communities. ITI has a lead role in the advancement of the NWT Agriculture Strategy and in supporting the development of the agriculture sector. Their involvement in this area of work is essential.

As you may be aware, the Department's public health officials must remain focused on actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, our participation in discussions about animal health services will be modest. However, we are able to contribute a public health perspective to interdepartmental work, as we recognize the close connections between animal health and human health.

Thank you.

Julie Green
Minister of Health and Social Services

c   Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

        Legislative Coordinator
        Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs

        Honourable Shane Thomspon
        Minister, Environment and Natural Resources

        Honourable Paulie Chinna
        Minister, Municipal and Community Affairs

        Honourable Caroline Wawzonek
        Minister, Industry, Tourism and Investment