



March 30, 2021

JACKIE JACOBSON
MLA, NUNAKPUT**Oral Question 590-19(2): Mental Health Concerns in Small Communities**

This letter is in follow up to the Oral Question you raised on February 25, 2021 regarding Mental Health Concerns in Small Communities.

I am very sorry to hear of recent events in Nunakput. The impacts of mental health and addictions on families and communities is significant and requires a timely, safe and supportive response. The Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority (NTHSSA) is actively working with community leadership to put plans in place to support the mental health and wellness of communities. This often involves staff traveling into a community.

For Tuktoyaktuk, two mental health professionals from Yellowknife traveled into the community on March 8, 2021 and remained there for one week. These NTHSSA staff members joined the Paulatuk counsellor who was already in the community providing coverage for the vacant Child Youth and Family Counsellor position. They met with community members, community leadership and health and social services staff in the community to review needs, discuss concerns and establish next steps. Following this engagement, plans for mental health supports in the community were established. This plan includes the counselor from Paulatuk continuing to provide phone, virtual and in person support until the vacancy in the community is filled. Should residents require mental health supports and do not have access to a phone, they can use a private room at the health centre to access the phone counseling services.

In cases where a suicide attempt has taken place, the person is assessed and treated medically as a first step. This may include certification under the Mental Health Act. If admission to hospital is not required, or upon discharge a risk assessment is completed, the individuals are equipped with a safety plan including community based supports and active referral to services. It will ultimately be up to the person to choose to follow up on those offered supports and services.

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NTHSSA regional teams provide a variety of resources, supports, and coverage options that are informed by the unique needs of the community, the situation at hand, and the availability of staff. This can include a counsellor travelling to the community for a 2-3 week stay or on a rotational basis. The NTHSSA will continue to use virtual care in regions and communities needing additional supports. This would include having virtual care access coordinated at the health centre or counselling office in order to ensure access is available to all individuals, including those without access to technology. The NTHSSA is working with Human Resources to determine options for casual employees who could be deployed to provide urgent coverage.

As you know, it is important to remind residents and those who are struggling that they are not alone and supports are available. If you are concerned for the well being of a friend or loved one, it is important to reach out, stay connected and offer supports. If there is concern for their immediate safety or if they are in distress, emergency services should be accessed by calling 911 or going to the local health centre. In non-emergency situations, people can access the same day appointments through the Community Counselling Program. People can also contact the NWT Helpline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for support, as well as the Kids Help Phone.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JAGreen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie Green
Minister of Health and Social Services

c Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Legislative Coordinator
Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs