



January 17, 2025

ROBERT HAWKINS
MLA, YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

Oral Question 399-20(1): Diagnostic Rates for Autism

In follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on October 31, 2024, regarding the average wait time for diagnosis of autism using a specialist, the following is provided.

In 2023-24, over half of the children referred to the Child Development Team for assessment received services for potential or diagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

ASD diagnosis currently occurs at the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital in Edmonton by physician referral with supporting rehabilitation assessments. The current wait time is approximately 18-24 months. While many families access this service, there are variables that delay the process or can challenge the families with barriers that may include:

- Difficulties in travel, as some families are unable to take their child safely on a plane due to the dysregulation that can occur with ASD. These families may decline assessment and we risk their needs not being captured appropriately.
- Challenges to complete and return the required family questionnaire (literacy, logistics to print/mail questionnaire).

The NWT Health and Social Services system provides access to service based on need, not diagnosis. Enhancing diagnostic capacity has benefits for children and their supporters including:

- Education and coaching for caregivers and community stakeholders around the child's specific neurodiversities.
- Implementation of diagnosis specific evidenced based intervention strategies.
- Helping autistic individuals understand neurodiversity's can improve mental wellness.
- Diagnosis can improve access to supports beyond health care services, such as post-secondary or employment.

Thank you.

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

Les Semmler
Minister, Health and Social Services

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