

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

WAIT TIMES FOR AUDIOLOGY SERVICES

October 16, 2018

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. When a constituent talked to me in the summer with concerns about wait times for audiology services, I did a little research and there is definitely cause for concern.

Data supplied to me by the Minister of Health and Social Services shows a trend of mounting demand and longer waiting times. In April 2014, there were 10 adult patients waiting for up to week. A year later, 152 patients were waiting 26 weeks. Wow. As of April this year, 180 patients were waiting 38 weeks.

As bad as the adult backlog is for audiology, it's even worse for children. The wait times for children have ballooned from 16 weeks in April 2014 to 70 weeks in April 2018, with 64 children on the wait list. Imagine 70 weeks waiting for an appointment. A child can go an entire school year without being tested or assisted with hearing difficulties. This is totally unacceptable.

It is my understanding that our audiology services are also provided to some western Nunavut communities. Travel clinics are also held in nine NWT communities. Other patients travel to Yellowknife or Inuvik for testing. When positions are full, we should have a staff of three audiologists and/or hearing aid practitioners. Not surprisingly, a combination of staff vacancies seems to have triggered the backlog, and it's been difficult to cut wait times when demand for services has also increased by almost 25 per cent over the last eight years.

The Minister has informed me that there should be a significant improvement in wait times with the staffing of the vacant position in Inuvik. I'm not holding my breath, and felt compelled to raise the issue of wait times for audiology here today.

I have a couple of suggestions for the Minister to consider, given the wait times for audiology. Firstly, could the funds not expended for vacant positions be spent on locums?

Secondly, I was surprised to learn that we have a huge audiology service backlog dating back to 2014-2015. Obviously, there is a need for greater disclosure of wait times across all medical services to ensure accountability and better focus our limited resources.

Later today I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services on the unacceptably high wait times for audiology services and how we can improve public disclosure and planning for wait times across all of our medical services. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.