

**KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE**  
**Diagnostic Services Wait Times Reporting**  
**Committee of the Whole—2019-2020 Operating Budget Review**  
**Dept. of Health and Social Services—February 26, 2019**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, there have been some fairly healthy increases in therapeutic services here over the last couple of years, the same to a lesser degree with diagnostic services. Can someone explain what is happening? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. In the therapeutic services area, there have been some increases over the years. We've been doing a multi-year roll-out in this particular area. In phase one, we rolled out a speech-language pathologist and an occupational therapist and an audiologist in Inuvik, as well as one admin person to help with those services in Inuvik. Just as a note, I'd like to recognize that all of those positions are filled. I think the speech-language pathologist will be starting on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Phase two is to roll out another speech-language pathologist in Yellowknife, an assistant in Yellowknife, an occupational therapist in Yellowknife, as well as admin support in Yellowknife to help support the hub-and-spoke model, to increase services across the Northwest Territories in these areas.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Mr. O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Thanks for that information. The phase two increases, are they found in this budget, or are they spread out over a number of years? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Phase two increases are 2019-2020 increases. They appear in this budget. Phase one [microphone turned off].

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Could you please repeat that? You kind of broke up there.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** My apologies, Mr. Chair. Phase one was 2018-2019. Phase two is 2019-2020, so it appears in this budget. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Mr. O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Is there anywhere that the public or Regular MLAs can go to see waiting times? I know the information is tracked somehow, but is it actually publicly reported in any way? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Mr. Chair, right now, the answer is no, but I, like the Member, believe it's important for people to know, and the department is working to getting to the point where we can report on some wait times. It is not here today, but it is work that is being done. I want to see it. The Member wants to see it. I think I've been

asked in the House over the last couple of days a number of questions on wait times. People want to see it, so I will be directing the department to find a way to make that information public. Having said that, these investments we're making today will help us reduce the wait times, but we won't see them reduced until we bring people in and get them trained and start the work. We should start to see some improvements now, as a result of the Beaufort Delta investments, and we will see more improvements once we get Yellowknife staffed up. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Mr. O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the passion of the Minister on this. Any idea as to when the waiting times might be available? Is there a plan in place to do this? With the system transformation and so on, I understand that there's probably still some work that needs to be done there to standardize reporting and so on, but is it the Minister's intention to try to have this work done, what quarter of, say, 2019-2020, where the public could expect to start to see some wait times maybe posted to a website or whatever? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. What has become clear over the last little while and I think it's something we may not have recognized had we not moved to a single authority is there really isn't a solid definition of how people determine wait lists across the Northwest Territories. Now, in moving forward, the department is working closely with the authority to come up with some solid definition on how to define wait times. That work is underway. Once that work is concluded, we'll be in a better position to figure out how to report in a consistent manner wait times for all of the different services that we provide. Then and only then we'll probably be in a position to figure out how to get it out into the public. I anticipate we will be able to get the work done around trying to figure out what a usable definition of wait times and how to assess it is, and, from there, we'll make the second step. I'm cautious to commit to a time at this point because there is a significant amount of work being done by these people in other areas, but the department is committed to getting it done, and we'll certainly keep committee up to date as we make progress.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Mr. O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Sorry. I don't want to flog a dead horse here, but could the Minister make a commitment to, I don't know, report to the standing committee maybe on a quarterly basis where the work stands, just so committee and Regular MLAs know the progress that's being made and when, say, a launch date might be scheduled? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Abernethy.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not going to make that commitment, but what I will commit to is having the department sit down and quantify what it thinks it will take as far as timelines to determine and work with the authority to define how wait lists will be determined and, from there, how long it will take to find a mechanism to reasonably and responsibly make that information public on a regular

basis. I will commit to having the department do the analysis on how long they think that will take, and share that with committee.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Minister Abernethy. Mr. O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks. I appreciate the commitment made by the Minister, and I will look forward to getting that information. Thank you.