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Sustainability of Health Care System
Committee of the Whole—2017-2018 Operating Budget Review
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MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I want to start off with some good things, and I did mention this in my reply to the budget address, but there are some good things in this budget. There is some extra money in here for extended hours for a homeless shelter here in Yellowknife. There's also some additional money for a sobering centre here in Yellowknife. Those are some of the good things in here.

One of the biggest issues for me with this particular budget is the sustainability of our healthcare system, and this was something that was raised to me during a recent constituency meeting, as well. We want to give some credit to the Minister and his department for leading with the transformation exercise to Territorial Health and Social Services Authority, the Regional Wellness Councils, and I think we've got some extra upfront costs in setting these things up, but there will be some long-term dividends that are paid down the road.

That's the same kind of approach that we as Regular MLAs took in some of the additional spending that we want to see put into the budget. So that's where we're coming from, but one of the biggest issues, I think, for us in terms of sustainability is the recent deal that was signed with the federal government. In my humble opinion, it was not a good deal. It was less than the original deal that was offered to the provinces and territories. We were only informed about that deal by e-mail just a day or two before it was actually signed. There was no consultation with Regular MLAs. No explanation of why we had to sign off on it at that point or why we couldn't wait for a better deal and why we couldn't continue to work with the larger provinces. There was no news release and no technical briefing that's been offered to us.

According to the Premier, it's going to leave us with a shortfall of at least \$1.35 million a year over the next 10 years. So I think one of the other big issues around sustainability of our healthcare system is our growing seniors' population, and I know that the Minister and the department had put together a report on our long-term care needs. That's a good first step. I know that there's some additional \$500,000 in the budget for the Seniors Housing Repair program. That's helpful to promote aging in place, but Regular MLAs, we ask for \$1.5 million to be added into the budget. So we're weren't quite, I guess, where we would like to be.

I know that the Minister also said that he's developing a continuing care services action plan, and that is a good thing. It is going to bring together a number of these streams. The difficulty is there is no money in the budget this year for that, so the earliest we are going to see any money is 2018-19. That is not to say that the department is not working on those issues now, not spending money on those things. I know we need to do the work, but I had expected to see some money in the budget to help promote that kind of work. I think that is some of the extra money that the Regular MLAs would like to see added into the budget. We want that kind of investment now. That is why we

suggested that there be \$1.5 million added into the budget for home care now. That will bring, again, longer-term cost savings, and we view that as a strategic investment.

Similarly, we want to see an increase in anti-poverty funding of \$500,000. That would essentially be a doubling of the current program. I have been to a couple of these round-table meetings. I think they are helpful in terms of networking, but we have to move beyond networking. We need to start to work towards strategic investment of the money that is available and looking at how we actually measure progress towards the elimination of poverty in the Northwest Territories.

In any event, Regular MLAs are seeking more money for the anti-poverty fund, and I would be happy to work with the Minister to try to move towards more strategic investment of that money. We get great value from our NGOs. I know the Minister knows that, but we have also got to think about how to evaluate progress.

Regular MLAs are also seeking an investment of \$500,000 for youth in crisis to help us deal with the epidemic of suicides and addictions. We have also suggested a mobile intervention team. That would be helpful. I think there is probably some assistance and support for that available from the federal government.

I think one other idea I want to put on the table in terms of how we can contribute towards the sustainability of our healthcare system is that we need to work with provinces and the territories towards a national pharmacare program. That was in the news here recently, across the country. CBC did some great work in looking at that issue. They have a national pharmacare program in New Zealand, and their drug costs are a fraction of what we have to pay here in Canada. I know we have some arrangements in place, working with the western provinces and territories to get a limited number of drugs at reduced costs, but we need a national program. I will have some questions for the Minister about how we are working together to try to get that national pharmacare program up and going.

I think there are also some issues with regard to drug costs for folks here. Some people are covered under non-insured health benefits. Other people are covered through extended healthcare benefits. Our government employees, we pay into a plan. So some of those costs are covered, but, if you are not covered by any of those programs, you are in real trouble. I see the Minister shaking his head. He knows that. That is why I think we need to work together to get a national pharmacare program in place.

I do have some questions for the Minister around the status of the NIHB negotiations and where we are at in trying to renegotiate that. I also have some questions around the status of the action plan on disabilities. Of course, I will have some questions on one of my favourite topics, midwifery services. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to bring forward those initial comments. It is a good start with the budget, but Regular MLAs want to see some additional investment to pay off long-term dividends. Thank you, Mr. Chair.