

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

PUBLIC HEALTH TRENDS

February 24, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. The recent release of the Health and Social Services System 2019-2020 Annual Report paints a picture of many major health conditions and trends for the Northwest Territories. There are some positive outcomes shown, including a decrease in potentially avoidable mortality due to preventable causes, as well as those due to treatable causes; a decrease in the rate of children in permanent care; a decrease in the proportion of mental health hospitalizations due to alcohol or drugs; and a decrease in workplace safety claims.

However, the overall health of our residents is still not improving in a number of significant areas, including mental health hospitalizations remain at twice the western Canada average, with four in 10 related to substance abuse, about four times the national average; and one-third of NWT residents smoke, three in 10 drink heavily, and four in 10 are considered obese. Client satisfaction with Health and Social Services systems has also fallen below 90 percent for the first time since measurements started in 2004.

Against this backdrop, Health and Social Services recently released a further report examining potential social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report tracks indicators related to child maltreatment, mental health and addictions, alcohol-related harm, and family violence. It's also a good check-in regarding what's happening with people during a pandemic.

Taken as a whole, though, the annual and the pandemic reports describe a Health and Social Services system hard pressed to respond, let alone improve, the overall well-being of our residents. While this year's budget promises a \$75-million increase in funding for healthy communities and citizens' programs, we just don't seem to be making significant overall progress. I'll have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services on the way forward for improving wellness and health of our residents. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.