

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

SUICIDE PREVENTION FUND

March 30, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. The recent announcement of \$225,000 for a community suicide prevention fund is good news in our continuing struggle to confront this social tragedy. Providing up to \$45,000 per project, the fund will enable Indigenous governments and non-governmental organizations to develop and deliver community-based suicide prevention activities. The announcement stressed an approach through programs that are "culturally-safe and support the prevention of suicide by increasing community wellness and reducing stigma." The announcement further said that the fund will prioritize projects that demonstrate a community development approach to suicide prevention, awareness, and stigma reduction.

That's all good stuff, but it prompted a constituent of mine to write with her family experience of suicide, including factors of stigma, lack of intensive counselling, especially at the small community level, and follow-up after actual suicide attempts. My constituent stressed the need for continuing care after a suicide crisis as key to preventing chronic, personal cycles of suicide attempts. Individualized after-care plans and better family supports are needed.

There are programs in place. The Community Counseling Program is a free and confidential service open to all residents. There are 70 staff and 33 child and youth care counsellors, and same-day appointments that no longer have any wait lists. The Health and Social Services department says it is working on a "stepped care" model offering a wide range of service options. These include improvements to family and peer supports, e-based options, on-the-land as well as community options and increased in-patient care. I am told this work includes development of a suicide prevention and crisis response network in partnership with the NWT Health and Social Services Authority.

Even with all of these initiatives, the Northwest Territories continues to suffer rates of suicide at alarming levels compared to other territories and provinces. I will have questions later today for the Minister of Health and Social Services on how our suicide prevention and follow-up efforts can be further strengthened. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.