



September 28, 2023

MLA Currie Dixon
Chair
Public Accounts Committee
Box 2703
Whitehorse, YT Y1A 2C6

Dear MLA Dixon:

RE: Office of the Auditor General of Canada's performance audit of COVID-19 Vaccines in the Yukon

The Government of Yukon is grateful to the Office of the Auditor General of Canada for their examination and constructive feedback on the Yukon's COVID-19 vaccine rollout. We are pleased to provide the Public Accounts Committee with an overview of our workplan and steps taken to address the report's recommendations.

Recommendation: The Department of Health and Social Services, the Department of Community Services, and the Executive Council Office should update their emergency plans so that they complement each other to ensure a prompt and comprehensive response to future health emergencies.

Status: The Government of Yukon updated its pandemic plan in 2020 to respond to the pandemic. In addition, the government is conducting a review of the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* and the *Public Health and Safety Act* that will include focused engagement with Yukon First Nations and municipalities. This review is specific to how these Acts affected the ability of the Yukon government, and First Nation and municipal governments to respond to the pandemic. The Government of Yukon's emergency plan will be updated with lessons learned from the pandemic alongside this review.

Recommendation: For future vaccine rollouts, the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Community Services should provide and communicate alternatives to online and phone options for booking services that are as barrier-free as possible.

Status: The Government of Yukon will provide and communicate alternatives to online and phone options for booking services during future vaccine rollouts. Outreach efforts to reach vulnerable populations, providing vaccine clinics as close to home as possible, and offering walk-in appointments as soon as logistically feasible will continue being part of the government's vaccine planning and implementation processes.

Recommendation: The Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Community Services, with the support of the Executive Council Office, should partner with Yukon First Nations to outline the expected level and frequency of collaboration during emergencies. This understanding should include clear roles and responsibilities and timing of communications during an emergency situation and should be reflected in emergency plans.

Status: The Department of Community Services, through the Emergency Measures Organization, is currently working with Yukon First Nations governments and municipalities to complete emergency coordination plans, develop emergency management capacity and build emergency-resilient communities. This work includes clearly defining roles, responsibilities and communications protocols during emergencies. Emergency coordination plans are revisited annually, which provides an opportunity to discuss these and other matters. As well, capacity-building training is provided to communities and First Nations governments each year as part of our normal course of business.

Recommendation: The Department of Health and Social Services should ensure that organizations providing similar services and facing comparable risks of infection should be prioritized for vaccination in an equivalent manner. This prioritization should be included in emergency planning documentation.

Status: The prioritization of front-line workers who provide health and social services will be included in future departmental pandemic planning.

Recommendation: The Department of Health and Social Services should ensure that Yukon-specific cultural competency training is delivered to those planning and providing front-line immunization services to better meet First Nations' needs.

Status: The Department of Health and Social Services will review and improve existing cultural competency training included in the Yukon Immunization Program's immunizer certification program by April 2024.

Recommendation: The Department of Health and Social Services, with the support of the Executive Council Office, should work with First Nations toward finalizing data-sharing protocols or agreements to meet the needs of First Nations.

Status: The Government of Yukon is working with, and will continue to work with, First Nations governments who are interested in establishing and finalizing data-sharing protocols and agreements.


Recommendation: The Department of Health and Social Services should develop accurate and comprehensive inventory systems and practices to track vaccine inventory, wastage, and expected coverage. This information should be used for decisions on timing and quantities of vaccine needed and to track the movement of vaccines in real time across the territory.

Status: The Department of Health and Social Services is in the final stages of implementing a new electronic Inventory Management System, integrated into the existing Panorama information management system, which adds real-time inventory counts across all facilities that store publicly-funded vaccine products. The new system will enable the department to review the current methods used to project vaccine uptake and adjust them as necessary to improve the accuracy of estimates to meet vaccine product needs. The new system is expected to be in place by April 2024.

We are proud that the Office of the Auditor General of Canada acknowledged our government's efforts in managing the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in a quick, fair and effective manner. Our united response played a significant role in protecting the lives of Yukoners and this reinforces our confidence in the effectiveness of our response to the pandemic.

Thank you for your interest in this important work.

Sincerely,



Justin Ferbey
Deputy Minister
Executive Council Office



Matt King
Deputy Minister
Community Services



Tiffany Boyd
Deputy Minister
Health and Social Services