



**Department of Health and Social Services
PO Box 2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6**

August 13, 2021

Currie Dixon, Chair
Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Dear Mr. Dixon,

I am pleased to provide you with a status report on the progress the Department of Health and Social Services has made with respect to the recommendations identified in the *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Yukon – Mental Health Services in Rural Yukon – Department of Health and Social Services* as requested by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Enclosed with this status report you will also find the Action plan the Department has prepared, which outlines some of the key actions that have been undertaken since the Auditor General of Canada's review of rural mental health services in the Yukon.

Community-based mental health services are a priority for Health and Social Services. As a department we were pleased with the overall findings in the report and welcomed the recommendations. As you are aware, the auditors determined that the Department of Health and Social Services successfully increased access to mental health services in rural communities during the timeframe of the audit, from May 5, 2016 to September 1, 2020.

Health and Social Services strives for continuous improvement in the services we provide to all Yukoners. As service providers, particularly in this critical area of providing quality mental health services, we strive to work with communities to respond to the changing needs of those communities, while ensuring we are adhering to best practices to support the health and wellness of all Yukoners.

1) Engaging with First Nations governments

The Department has been actively working with Yukon First Nations governments and communities to ensure that strong relationships are established, and that the needs and desires of communities are reflected in the services available to them. This work includes: active involvement in community cultural and wellness events; supporting communities with the services they identify a need for during periods of community crisis; development of a Community Hub Performance Measurement Plan, which will solicit feedback from community members and staff on programs and services; and ensuring participation of First Nations representatives on the hiring committees for the counsellors who will work in those communities.

2) Recruiting and retaining staff

The department has been actively and successfully filling positions on an ongoing basis. We are working with First Nations and other partners on creative solutions to support mental health and substance use services across the Yukon and are developing the recommended recruitment and retention strategy. This is supported by the hiring of a Human Resources Consultant who will focus on this area of work. The department has also established partnerships with Yukon Hospital Corporation and Canadian universities to provide practicum opportunities and support student placement opportunities in communities. Health and Social Services is also working on the development of a website that will focus on recruiting and retaining talented health care professionals. This website is expected to launch in the spring of 2022.

3) Improving Cultural Safety

Improving the cultural safety of the programs and services offered to Yukoners by Health and Social Services is an important component of ensuring services are effective and meeting the needs of Yukoners. The department has been actively working with Yukon First Nations and external organizations such as the *San'yas*: Indigenous and Cultural Safety Training Program to develop a Yukon-specific cultural training program. It is also recognized that Yukon First Nations may have specific cultural practices that need to be understood and reflected in the services provided in those communities. As such, we have been working to respond to those individual needs by ensuring staff participate in community based cultural activities.

4) Measuring Performance

Health and Social Services is acutely aware that improving the collection of information and data is key to measuring the performance of programs and services effectively, to ensure the department is meeting the needs of the people it works with. As noted in the Auditor General's report, one of the key responses that will support the work of the department overall is the creation in late 2020 of the Population and Public Health Evidence and Evaluation Branch. This branch will play an integral part in supporting the development and evaluation work undertaken by the department. As noted above, Health and Social Services is also developing a survey for clients and staff, which will be distributed quarterly to seek feedback on their experiences and allow us to adjust accordingly.

As you can see, since September 1, 2020, the department has worked to actively respond to the four recommendations of the Office of the Auditor General. While this status report and the accompanying Action Plan identify specific work to date, the department will need to continue its work with Yukon First Nations and communities to adapt our efforts as time goes on. We are committed to remaining flexible and responsive in the work we do with communities.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to review this report with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. We would be pleased to answer any additional questions you may have with respect to the actions Health and Social Services has undertaken in response to the Auditor General's report on mental health services in Yukon communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SS', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stephen Samis
Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services