

**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF THE OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL  
OF CANADA ON THE  
2021 REPORT OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA  
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN RURAL YUKON—  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**SUBMITTED TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**18 August 2021**

The Office of the Auditor General of Canada submitted an audit report on Mental Health Services in Rural Yukon to the Yukon Legislative Assembly on 7 June 2021.

The audit looked at whether the Department of Health and Social Services provided Yukoners living in rural areas with mental wellness and substance use services that met their needs. It focused on whether the department met its responsibility for developing and delivering mental health services in the 17 rural communities where services have historically been less accessible than in Whitehorse. The majority of rural communities are populated by First Nations people, and culture is an important factor in how services are delivered.

This audit is important because mental health is a central component of individual, family, and community life and must be supported by services that meet the needs of communities, even during a pandemic situation. Having accessible services in rural communities as part of a permanent local structure makes it easier for people to get the help they need when they need it.

Overall, the department successfully increased access to mental health services in rural communities. The department implemented Mental Wellness and Substance Use hubs in 4 key rural communities. Each of these hubs is also responsible for providing services to the surrounding communities, making mental health services more accessible to rural Yukoners.

The department maintained access to mental health services while adapting to the many effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, services were available by telephone and online, with some limited in-person availability.

Although the department has increased access to mental health services, it has struggled to recruit and retain staff to deliver these services. The department will need to address this challenge to fully realize the potential benefits of providing mental health services in rural Yukon through its hubs.

The department had made some progress in terms of measuring performance, such as gathering data on wait times for counselling services. However, as there was no historical information to compare current data with, it was not possible to determine whether services had improved.

The department has not yet set targets to measure and report on its service delivery efforts. Therefore, at this point, it does not know if the services being provided through its hubs are meeting the needs of Yukoners.

The Department of Health and Social Services has agreed with all the recommendations. The successful implementation of these recommendations, with specific commitments and timelines set out in a comprehensive action plan, will be important to improve the department's ability to provide mental health services to rural Yukoners. Ongoing engagement with stakeholders will be critical for the department to identify adjustments and improvements to provide mental health services that are most needed and culturally safe.

We hope this information will be helpful to the committee in its study of the report.