

Biannual Public Report

Putting People First Implementation Committee

February 7, 2022

One of the stated commitments in the 2021 Confidence and Supply Agreement between the Yukon Liberal Caucus and the Yukon NDP Caucus is to establish joint policy implementation committees. The commitment states:

Section 3.2 Within one month of the swearing-in of a Yukon Liberal Government, two policy implementation committees shall launch. The committees will be comprised of the appropriate Cabinet Minister and a Yukon NDP MLA to work jointly with the civil service to finalize implementation of the Our Clean Future and Putting People First reports.

The Putting People First Implementation Committee (PPFIC) was established in June 2021. Its members are Honourable Tracy McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services and Annie Blake, MLA for Vuntut Gwitchin.

The *Putting People First* report was adopted by the Yukon government in August of 2020. The report is a roadmap to creating a people-centred approach to health and wellness in the territory that will be more effective and sustainable for the future.

Since being convened, the PPFIC has met four times. The PPFIC has focussed on two immediate commitments in the CASA – the supervised consumption site and the safer supply of opioids, as well as a third commitment due in the 2022-2023 budget, the territory-wide dental care plan. These projects were commitments of the CASA though not specifically outlined in the same language in the PPF report.

Supervised Consumption Site

In the CASA, Section 4.4 (e) states:

A supervised consumption site will be opened in Whitehorse on August 31, 2021.

This was a priority item for the PPFIC and there were several conversations about this site prior to the opening. The official opening was on September 29, 2021 after a one

month extension was agreed to by both caucuses and the operator. The site is operated in partnership with Blood Ties Four Direction. The site operates under an exemption for the *Controlled Drugs and Substance Act*.

Currently, the site can serve three clients at the same time and will expand to include inhalants in the coming months. It is one part of the Yukon's broader harm reduction services. Clients can access a number of harm reductions and social services at the location, including drug testing, harm reduction counselling, access to naloxone, drug use equipment exchange, medical care from a trained professional, counselling treatment services and training in safer use practices. They can also receive referrals to social, medical and mental wellness and substance use supports.

Supervised consumption sites offer a number of additional benefits including reducing the number of overdose deaths; increased referrals and entry into withdrawal and substance use treatment; reducing HIV and HCV risk; and improved access to medical treatment, health care and other support services.

The PPFIC will continue to receive updates on the progress the supervised consumption site. As this is a new service in the Yukon, adjustments to programming and operations may be needed.

Safer Supply

The CASA, Section 4 (4) e also states:

A safe supply of opioids will be available to people living with addictions within six months as a science-based harm reduction approach to tackle the opioid crisis in the territory.

The PPFIC met several times to discuss how this commitment would be achieved. The referred care clinic has been offering this option for some time but it is not widely accessible as it requires a physician to prescribe. Employees of the Mental Health and Substance Use team informed the PPFIC that the referred care clinic team could expand the number of people who access this option but to do this would require further training. Training has been arranged and as of Oct. 28, 2021 the service is expanding to accommodate more Yukoners.

Safer supply refers to the provision of pharmaceutical drug supply of known quantity and quality, as a safer option for adults who use illegal drugs and are at high risk of

overdosing. Safer supply is a physician-prescribed and pharmacy-dispensed program that will help Yukoners who use opioids access a safer supply of opioids.

To support this service, government staff work with the Referred Care Clinic, the Opioid Treatment Services Program and an addictions medicine specialist from B.C. to support physicians as they become more comfortable in their role. The more physicians who are comfortable prescribing safe supply will result in increased access for Yukoners.

The PPFIC will continue to receive updates on how the service is being communicated to those who need to know what is available.

Territory-wide dental care plan

The Committee also discussed the implementation of the territory-wide dental care plan, as per the following CASA commitment relating to the 2022-2023 budget:

CASA Section 4.4 (b):

A territory-wide dental care plan shall be established, as per recommendation of the Putting People First report recommendation #5.8, with an initial investment of \$500,000 in the 2021-2022 budget to develop the program, which will be implemented and fully funded beginning with the 2022-23 budget.

Next Steps

The PPFIC will now concentrate on the implementation of the commitments in *Putting People First*. The PPFIC will receive updates from the Health and Social Services employees who are responsible for coordinating this work and will monitor progress on these important health and social service initiatives.

The PPFIC will continue to meet every six weeks or as needed.