

Biannual Public Report
Putting People First Implementation Committee
July 2022

The 2021 Confidence and Supply Agreement between the Yukon Liberal Caucus and the Yukon NDP Caucus requires the establishment of 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 the last report of this committee, the PPFIC has received updates on CASA commitments as well as the progress of *Putting People First* initiatives, which were accepted in full by the Yukon government in August 2020 and endorsed by both the Yukon Liberal and Yukon NDP caucuses.

These include:

Walk-in/call-in mental health clinic

The CASA Section 4.4 (a):

A seven day per week walk-in/call-in mental health clinic will be opened in Whitehorse to service the entire territory. It will be created, primarily by coordinating existing mental health resources.

A local organization has received funding to offer expanded mental health services and is in the process of hiring employees. Information about what the organization is

offering and how Yukoners can access the services will be shared broadly when seven day per week service is available.

Dental Care Program

The CASA, Section 4.4 (b) states:

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.

This is the recommendation in Putting People First:

Provide dental and other extended health benefits to uninsured Yukoners 5.8

Create an income-tested, payer-of-last-resort public plan for extended benefits. Many Yukoners have some access to extended health benefits through their employer. These benefits cover services like prescription drugs, dental care, vision care, physiotherapy, optometry, and necessary medical equipment. Some people do not have these benefits, which can make it difficult to afford these services.

Going without these health services can cause significant strain. It can lead to poor health outcomes, including pain, poor nutrition, increased risk for certain chronic diseases, and poorer quality of life (36).

A lack of extended benefits is often associated with unemployment, temporary employment and low wage employment situations. This means that people who do not have these benefits through their employer are also the least able to afford paying out-of-pocket for these services. In 2017, an estimated 11% of Yukoners were in a low-income situation, while an estimated 5% of Yukoners were receiving social assistance. Social assistance clients are eligible for extended medical and dental benefits. Low-income Yukoners not receiving social assistance and without a benefits plan through their employer are left with no support.

Evidence shows that low-income Canadians without access to regular dental health services use more health services, including visits to physicians' offices and the emergency department, to deal with dental

conditions that would be better treated in regular oral health care settings such as dentists' offices (37).

The Final Report of the Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare concluded that lack of access to affordable prescription medicines escalates demand on the health care system that could otherwise be avoided. By increasing access to prescription medication, the government will improve health outcomes, decrease health system use and save the health care system significant money (38).

By developing comprehensive extended health benefits, the Government of Yukon will begin to close the gaps experienced by low-income Yukoners who do not have access to extended benefits. The new program will be income-tested and use a payer-of-last resort model. This means that the plan will not apply to Yukoners who already have insurance. As discussed in Chapter 8, the administration of these benefits will be outsourced to an external service provider to optimize efficiency (see recommendation 8.6).

This recommendation sets the direction for the dental care plan the department will implement.

Work on a territory-wide, income-tested, payer-of-last resort dental care plan is underway. It is expected to launch in December, 2022 becoming the fourth public dental benefit program provided by Health and Social Services. In order to move this ahead quickly, the program will initially be backed by policy. Once the program is implemented, Health and Social Services has committed to develop legislation to further support the program.

The department is also considering how to deliver dental care to rural Yukoners as this program is developed. Dentistry in the Yukon is provided by private dental clinics.

Land based healing

The committee agreed that land-based healing is valuable and should be a tool used in the response to the Substance Use Health Emergency. The Committee also acknowledged that these programs have the most value when they are developed and

run by First Nations. The Committee also recognized that aftercare support would also be a valuable focus.

The 2022/23 budget has money available to support land-based healing programs. This information has been shared with First Nation Chiefs at the Yukon Forum and will continue to be part of a broader conversation about a territory-wide response to drug poisoning deaths as well as substance use and mental health services.

Yukon Government has committed to support a broad range of application and requests for funding.

Walk-in Clinic

The PPFIC also discussed the opening of a medical walk-in clinic. This was a commitment made by Minister McPhee in the spring legislative assembly. Recognizing that many Yukoners do not have a family physician, the Department of Health and Social Services is working with a local physician to support the re-opening of a private medical walk-in clinic. This will not be a publicly run clinic though the government is committed to offsetting some start-up costs to help increase Yukoner's access to non-emergent medical services.

Organizational changes

The PPFIC also received an update on organizational changes within the Department of Health and Social Services. The Premier appointed an additional Deputy Minister with the Department of Health and Social Services to oversee the development of the new public health agency. This change supports the implementation of *Putting People First* initiatives while continuing to offer the existing services provided by the department.

Next Steps

The PPFIC will continue to monitor the progress of the *Putting People First* initiatives and will receive updates from Health and Social Services regarding the implementation of the commitments in *Putting People First*.

The Committee will also continue to receive information about the number of Yukoners served by the new private medical walk-in clinic.