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Building *Nunavut* Together
Nunavut liuqatigiingniq
Bâtir le *Nunavut* ensemble

Government of Nunavut
Progress Report to Recommendations
of the Standing Committee on
Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts,
Dated April 2013

**Report on the Review of the 2011 Report of the Auditor General
of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut on Children,
Youth and Family Programs and Services**

Department of Health
and
Department of Family Services
August 2013

Introduction

The Government of Nunavut acknowledges the important role that the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts (Standing Committee) has with respect to ensuring that the government is held to account on reports of the Auditor General.

As the lead department on the Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut – 2011 (Children, Youth and Family Programs and Services in Nunavut) (the Auditor General of Canada's report), the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) committed to tabling progress reports. With the transfer of the Social Services Division to the Department of Family Services (DFS) on April 1, 2013, DFS and the Department of Health (Health) urge Members of the 4th Assembly to consider splitting responsibility of the annual updates. Responsibility for reporting on the child and family services, adoption in Nunavut, and program coordination sections of the Auditor General of Canada's report should reside with DFS, while the public health strategy should reside with Health.

This Progress Report will first comment on specific references to reporting to the Legislative Assembly that the Standing Committee's Report on the Review of the Auditor General of Canada's report noted, as follows:

1. On page 5, the Standing Committee noted that it "looks forward to regular updates being tabled in the House on the status of the implementation of the Action Plan". DFS and Health are pleased to table this Progress Report which contains progress updates from June, 2011 to March, 2013 on the Standing Committee's recommendations. Because the Office of the Auditor General has commenced a follow-up report, which will include a review of progress made on the Action Plan, this report does not provide comments on the Action Plan.
2. On page 7, the Standing Committee referenced the new position of Residential Care Compliance Coordinator and other initiatives with respect to the annual reports of the Director of Child and Family Services. Annual reports of the Director of Child and Family Services (2010-11 and 2011-12) continue to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly. The tabling of the annual report became a statutory obligation during the spring 2013 sitting of the Legislative Assembly when Bill 51 – An Act to Amend the Child and Family Services Act – received Assent.

With respect to the Standing Committee's specific recommendations, DFS and Health have provided information below on the progress made to March 31, 2013.

Child and Family Services

Standing Committee Recommendation #1:

One essential recommendation is that:

“The Department of Health and Social Services, in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources, should develop short-, medium-, and long-term strategies to fill community social services workers positions in order to ensure that each community has adequate child and family services coverage.”

In response, the Department of Health and Social Services indicated that it will continue to work with a dedicated Human Resources officer towards this objective. The Standing Committee supports this recommendation and further recommends that both departments work together to re-evaluate the required qualifications for community social worker positions, with special emphasis on giving weight to prospective employees' knowledge and awareness of the Inuit language and societal values.

Department of Family Services and Department of Health response:

Most Community Social Service Worker (CSSW) positions have been filled with either indeterminate or casual staff through a concerted recruitment effort that began in the fall of 2011. This has resulted in 25 of the 41 CSSW positions in the territory being filled with indeterminate staff, 10 filled by casual staff, and 6 vacant positions (being served from other communities). With the low vacancy rate, staffing capacity has effectively been increased by 40%.

Sufficient and adequate staff housing and office space continue to be challenges in filling positions and staff retention.

Standing Committee Recommendation #2:

The Auditor General also recommended that:

“The Department of Health and Social Services should provide supplemental training, including Inuit societal values training, that community social service workers require, based on the training needs and gaps identified in annual audits and appraisals.”

The Standing Committee strongly supports this recommendation.

Department of Family Services and Department of Health Response:

In March 2013, funding from the Department of Human Resources' training fund was used to secure access to web-based training / education resources. The rollout of a child welfare learning portal (PART) and a library of online courses (Essential Learning) – both core and developmental disabilities curriculums – are currently underway. Resources regarding Inuit culture, historical parenting practices, the impact of residential schools, and other cultural materials are being added to a classroom within the online learning library.

Standing Committee Recommendation #3:

A number of the Auditor General's recommendations in this area focused on the administrative requirements of case management. While the Standing Committee recognizes the need for complete and accurate record-keeping, as well as the importance of reviewing and analyzing information, it also recognizes that the overwhelming workload is a factor in incomplete record-keeping. The Standing Committee further recommends that government accelerate the process of freeing social workers from the additional burden of providing correctional services on behalf of the Department of Justice.

Department of Family Services and Department of Health response:

Effective February 1, 2013, the transfer of community correctional service functions to the Department of Justice was completed.

Standing Committee Recommendation #4:

The Standing Committee recommends that the Department of Health and Social Services set clear guidelines for how the results of Criminal Records Checks will be used to determine the eligibility of foster homes or adoptive families. It is important to recognize that there are distinctions between different grades of criminal offences, which was an issue acknowledged by departmental witnesses during the Standing Committee's hearings.

Department of Family Services and Department of Health response:

In the spring of 2011, a review was undertaken by the Deputy Public Guardian to confirm that current criminal record checks were on file for all staff working in group homes in which adults resided at that time.

The Child Welfare Standards are being amended to require that foster family criminal record checks be completed on any new people who move into the home.

Attempts are made to place children coming into care with extended family members (kinship care). At the time of placement, CSSWs do a preliminary assessment of the safety and suitability of the home, and initiate the paperwork for the required criminal record check(s).

Adoption

Standing Committee Recommendation #5:

The Auditor General's report recommends that the Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act be considered for review. The Auditor General notes further that a 2003 report prepared by the Nunavut Law Review Commission, which was tabled in the this House on December 4, 2003, and which forms part of the permanent public record of our territory, focused on issues relating to custom adoptions and contained 28 recommendations which have not yet been addressed by the government.

The Standing Committee agrees that the issue of adoption across Nunavut should be reviewed.

Department of Family Services and Department of Health response:

Through the Knowledge Sharing Forum and the Social Services Review consultations, further feedback regarding custom adoptions in relation to the current legislation and practice has been received.

A training session and consultation with Custom Adoption Commissioners took place February 25th and 26th, 2013 in Iqaluit. During this meeting, the challenges of applying Inuit custom adoption practices within the modern Nunavut context were discussed. Custom Adoption Commissioner responsibilities were reviewed and discussed, along with limitations of the current Act.

DFS will explore the possibility of amending the Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act in the 4th Assembly.

Public Health Strategy

Standing Committee Recommendation #6:

One of the key observations made by the Office of the Auditor General is that

“it was still unclear to many people we interviewed who was ultimately accountable for the implementation and success of the Public Health Strategy.”

In addition, the Auditor General’s report notes that

“the Department has not established a methodology and surveillance system to gather information in a timely way from all branches and other departments involved in the Strategy.”

The effectiveness of the Strategy cannot be measured without the necessary data. The Standing Committee strongly supports the Auditor General’s recommendation that the department put the appropriate information systems in place. Committee Members further note that having relevant baseline data would assist in identifying public health issues which may arise from time to time.

The Standing Committee recommends that the Department of Health and Social Services ensure that establishing an information system to track and report on the health status of Nunavummiut is a departmental priority.

Department of Family Services and Department of Health response:

Responsibilities and accountabilities have been clarified, including the approval of the Public Health Strategy (PHS) Steering Committee membership. This Committee reports to the Chief Medical Officer of Health, who reports to the Deputy Minister - Health. Terms of Reference of the Committee were finalized in January 2013 and are to be reviewed annually. Job descriptions detailing roles and responsibilities have been developed for positions such as the Manager - Public Health Strategy Implementation and Community Health Representatives.

A baseline indicators report with data on PHS indicators from 2008-2011 has been completed. An Evaluation Framework has been developed to track key PHS indicators.

The Nutaqqavut Health Information System is being implemented to track progress made in achieving the objectives set in the PHS. A basket of population health indicators, which will include a longer-term plan to track key PHS indicators into the future is being developed.

Program Coordination

Standing Committee Recommendation #7:

In light of the government's recent announcement in the 2011 Budget Address that it will be reviewing its organizational structure, the Standing Committee recommends that the benefits of dividing Health and Social Services into two distinct departments be taken into consideration.

Department of Family Services and Department of Health response:

The Government of Nunavut undertook a structural review which resulted in a number of changes. The Social Services Division has been transferred to the newly created Department of Family Services, as of April 1, 2013.

Standing Committee Recommendation #8:

A number of themes and issues emerged during the Standing Committee's review of the Auditor General's report. Accordingly, the Standing Committee recommends that the Department of Health and Social Services address the following areas for action:

1. The importance of responding to the Standing Committee's specific recommendations noted above.
2. The importance of resolving capacity issues. The Standing Committee recognizes that the severe shortage of personnel for providing child and family services has an impact on the practice of delivering those services. A number of aspects related to the hiring of social workers should be taken into account, such as reviewing the hiring criteria and workload pressures on current staff.
3. The importance of making training and supports available and accessible to staff. Adequate resources and funding must (to) be allocated to this objective.
4. The importance of recording and collecting accurate and detailed information, analyzing it and identifying potential areas for proactive interventions, either at the individual, community or territorial level.
5. The importance of investing in appropriate information management and reporting systems, and the training to manage those systems.
6. The importance of encouraging and supporting communities, families and individuals to take on more responsibility for providing children with safe, secure and healthy homes.
7. The importance of setting short-, medium-, and long-term objectives, including establishing the means to measure progress in achieving those objectives.

Department of Family Services and Department of Health response:

DFS and Health continue to concur with the areas of action noted by the Standing Committee. Efforts will continue to ensure progress is made.

Concluding Comments

The Department of Family Services notes that the task of addressing the recommendations of the Standing Committee and the Auditor General of Canada in relation to child welfare has been and continues to be challenging. However, positive changes have taken place. The Government of Nunavut is committed to implementing further improvements to the social services structure and developing service capacity.

With respect to the Public Health Strategy, the Department of Health has established clear lines of accountability and will be developing a renewed Action Plan.

Clearly, work on children, youth and family programs and services will continue into the 4th Assembly.