



REGISTERED NURSES ADVOCATING FOR HEALTH

Registered nurses are very familiar with the health care system. Their work with individuals and communities at many different levels provides them with a unique perspective and an opportunity to contribute to debates and decisions regarding health policy. Advocacy for individual clients and health in general is a natural part of our profession and that is why the Yukon Registered Nurses Association (YRNA) is presenting some ideas regarding health reform in the lead up to the territorial election on 11th October.

In many ways, Yukoners enjoy health care services that are superior to other parts of Canada. For example: we do not have the significant ER wait times seen elsewhere; we provide home care services with no cost to the individual; the health centres in rural communities provide care as needed around the clock.

However, it is generally recognized that we also face many challenges and that there is room for improvement at the system and program level. For example: access to a primary health care provider for Whitehorse citizens; comprehensive services for mental health and addictions; fractured delivery of services when multiple health and social agencies are involved. A number of territorial and national consultations over the last 12 years have sought to explore solutions for improving the health of Yukoners and the health care delivery system. These include:

- *Health Summit 99: Making Health Happen*, 1999
- *The Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada*, commonly known as the Romanow Report, 2002 (http://www.yrna.ca/assets/final_report.pdf)
- *Yukon Primary Health Care Planning Forum*, 2003
- and most recently the *Yukon Health Care Review*, 2008 (http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/pdf/yukon_health_care_review.pdf) and its follow-up, *Taking the Pulse: What We Found – a Public Dialogue on the Yukon Health Care Review*, 2009 (http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/pdf/yukon_health_care_review_final_report.pdf)

More specific examinations of health and social issues have also taken place, such as *The Task Force on Acutely Intoxicated Persons at Risk*, 2010 (http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/pdf/taskforce_final_report_2010.pdf) and *A Home For Everyone: A Housing Action Plan For Whitehorse* (<http://www.yapc.ca/assets/files/a-home-for-everyone.pdf>)

The public, health professionals and policy experts were engaged in these studies and research and innovative and successful practices related to health care delivery were examined. The resulting recommendations have been very similar over the years and

many ideas for improving the health of Yukoners and the system that delivers care have been provided, including:

- Health should be defined broadly, taking into account the social and environmental factors (such as affordable housing, financial security and access to healthy food and clean water) that influence an individual's and a community's health and wellbeing.
- Place a greater emphasis on health promotion and illness prevention in order to reduce illness – thereby improving the general health of the population and reducing the long term costs to the system
- Establish a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to the delivery of care by removing barriers within and between agencies and programs – thereby ensuring seamless, comprehensive care and preventing duplication or gaps in service
- Establish collaborative models of health care delivery which focus more on community-based services and where professionals work in multi-disciplinary teams which optimize the skills of all health care providers - thereby providing Yukoners with appropriate, direct and timely access to care from the right provider at the right time.

Some aspects of these recommendations have been implemented but a fundamental and integrated move towards a health care delivery system which is more efficient and more sensitive to patient and community needs has yet to be made. YRNA would encourage members and the public to raise these issues with candidates during the election campaign and to ask our politicians to take a more comprehensive and long-term approach to health care in the Yukon.