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Minister of Health Ministaat Aanniaqtailinirmut Ministre de la Santé

February 19, 2024

Ms. Janet Pitsiulaaq Brewster MLA Iqaluit-Sinaa Legislative Assembly of Nunavut 926 Sivumugiaq Street Iqaluit, NU X0A 3H0

Dear Ms. Brewster,

Thank you for your questions on the topic of suicide prevention during the 2023 Fall Sitting. Suicide prevention is a pressing issue that deserves attention and open discussion in the Legislative Assembly, and I appreciate your continued focus on supporting families and communities impacted by suicide. I understand the weight and importance of this matter and know it's a sensitive and deeply personal issue for many Nunavummiut. As you touched upon in your questions, there continues to be a sense of urgency and the need for further action on suicide prevention in Nunavut. Please know that my Department is working hard to respond, put in place additional supports, and work with Partners to meet the needs of Nunavummiut as we face this crucial challenge.

Your request regarding the declaration of a Public Health Emergency has been given careful consideration. Following your request, I undertook to meet with cabinet colleagues, departmental staff, and the Chief Public Health Officer to give this matter full consideration. The resulting recommendation is to not declare a public health emergency on suicide at this time. This is both because of the way emergencies are addressed, and the need to find the most effective strategy and actions to prevent suicide in the territory. While a Public Health Emergency would allow for some additional measures (for example, the ability to access private property), these additional measures would not necessarily help to address and decrease rates of suicide in Nunavut.

Additionally, while this type of declaration may draw even more political and media attention to suicide prevention, there is concern that this could take focus away from needed actions. There have been previous declarations on the issue of suicide in Nunavut, such as declaring a "public health crisis" in 2015. Previous action plans on the issue have made some progress but not enough. Declarations and public statements are

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926, rue Sivumugiaq, 2ème étage, Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 3H0 important, and can be useful, but without specific actions coupled with clear ownership and accountability from Partners, large-scale improvements are unlikely to occur. A solution for the suicide crisis in Nunavut requires long-term action and accountability for meaningful change. We believe that the best path forward is to have clear accountabilities, ownership, and partnership established through the Nunavut Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) Action Plan.

The updated NSPS Action Plan was to be released last year. Unfortunately, there have been delays in coming to a consensus on action items and determining ownership (the accountability framework). Working with multiple partner organizations offers the benefits of shared resources, skills, and talent - but it also presents challenges in terms of achieving consensus. The delays have been frustrating, but additional time has allowed NSPS Partners to further refine the NSPS Action Plan, to conduct additional consultation and produce a better finished product. It's now intended to move forward for public release by Spring 2024. While still to be finalized, there will be approximately 20 action item areas in the new NSPS Action Plan. Partners include the Embrace Life Council (ELC), multiple Government of Nunavut (GN) Departments, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI).

There are plans for a high-level meeting for the Action Plan's initial implementation and launch, and we envision strong public commitments from all participating partners on the listed action items. We also plan to engage all MLAs during the release to provide an overview and to seek support in the implementation. Following this initial period, the NSPS Action Plan will mandate specific follow-up and evaluation exercises to ensure implementation is on track. While I'm unable to speak to the details of the plan prior to Cabinet and Partner organization's approval, I expect the identified actions will span many sectors and will include additional focus on social determinants of health for Nunavummiut.

I realize that on the topic of declaring suicide a Public Health Emergency, this letter doesn't provide a favourable response. However, I hope you are left with a clear understanding of what Health and our Partners intend to do on the crucial issue of suicide prevention going forward. The new NSPS Action Plan and the anticipated renewed commitment from all Partners will provide new tools, new energy, and much needed hope in the years ahead. I would like to thank you again for keeping this issue in the forefront of our discussions in the Legislative Assembly and I look forward to continuing this dialogue.

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926, rue Sivumugiaq, 2ème étage, Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 3H0 If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out. I'm open to any specific suggestions, questions, or information requests you might have on this important topic.

Matna,

Hon. John Main Minister of Health Minister responsible for Suicide Prevention

CC: Hon. P.J. Akeeagok, Premier of Nunavut Ms. Aluki Kotierk, President, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated Opal McInnis, Chairperson, Embrace Life Council Andrew Blackadar, Chief Superintendent, Commanding Officer, RCMP V Division Megan Hunt, Deputy Minister of Health