



May 15, 2024

Hon. George Hickes
MLA, Iqaluit-Tasiluk
Chair – Committee of the Whole
Legislative Assembly of Nunavut
926 Sivumugiaq Street
Iqaluit, NU
X0A 3H0

Dear Mr. Hickes,

I wish to clarify and provide additional information to some of my responses during the Department of Health's (Health) appearance at Committee of the Whole on February 26, 27, 28, and March 1, 2024. Please find below additional information about the work of Health.

Medical Travel

Health typically spends \$130 to \$135M per year on air travel expenses, inclusive of medevacs. In fiscal year 2022/23, Health arranged over 26,931 scheduled airline tickets. Health's medical travel team is also responsible for booking duty travel for Health employees.

The Medical Travel Policy outlines entitlements and coverage, and Health staff are responsible for approval of medical travel requests, monitoring contracts and service delivery, and working with other Government of Nunavut departments and third parties to ensure quality services are provided throughout the medical travel process. Case management staff organize appointment bookings, flight, and accommodation requests, and communicate these details with clients.

Families may make a request to the Inuit Child First Initiative (ICFI) for their children, or other, to accompany them on medical travel arranged under Health's Medical Travel Policy. While Health does not book ICFI-related travel, Health may become involved if ICFI approval is made after Health's bookings and there are challenges with all travellers being on the same flight. In these cases, Health staff may need to rebook flights for those on medical travel, amend appointment times, etc. Between April 1, 2023, and March 20, 2024, ICFI booked travel for 811 requests in Nunavut, supporting 1,508 travellers. Most of these trips are connected to existing medical travel, although a small number of these trips may be linked to family visits.

eyewear, the current request for fiscal year 2024/25 is 811 total vision service days and up to 116 community trips. Health is currently awaiting response from ISC given the recent ratification of the 2024/25 contribution agreement.

Health has been working to shorten waitlists by expanding virtual care. Virtual care services are accessible in all 25 communities, allowing Nunavummiut to access timely health services virtually. A virtual cardiology clinic was deployed in the Qikiqtaaluk region with an Ottawa-based cardiologist consulting more than 250 patients on the waitlist. In addition, an allergist at the Ottawa Hospital was contracted by OHSNI to provide virtual triaging and care to patients. The expansion of virtual care allows clients to stay in their home communities to receive specialized care while also shortening waitlists.

Waitlist waiting times differ depending on the urgency of the referral in question and by speciality. Health also strives to use specialists' time efficiently; for example, if a client does not attend an appointment in Iqaluit, clients within the community are contacted to determine if they are able to attend last-minute, and extra clinics are added where possible when healthcare providers travelling to communities have layover time.

Mental Health and Addictions

Health's paraprofessional program aims to increase the number of Inuit in mental health care by providing the opportunity for training, growth, and advanced employment through career laddering. As of December 2023, there were 39 paraprofessionals hired across the territory who can be employed under the following titles: mental health and addictions program supervisor, mental health and addictions assistants, youth program facilitators, and mental health and addictions outreach workers. Health's Inuusivut, Mental Health and Addictions (IMHA) division is working with the Department of Human Resources to hire paraprofessionals at a faster rate.

During the appearance, a question was asked regarding how many regulations for the *Mental Health Act* had been finalized. In response, I noted that drafting had started this winter for the 10 regulations that were identified as priority. I would like to take this opportunity to clarify research is underway, but drafting has not started.

In response to whether there are specific person years (PY) or positions that will be dedicated solely to supporting the work of the Mental Health Review Board (Board), a Community Assistant Treatment Order (CATO) coordinator will support the Board part-time; this is included in the job description. At this time, existing positions will work to establish the Board and a consultant will be hired to assist with the training and development of protocols. The key functions of the Board are to review long-term hospitalizations and make decisions when there are disagreements, or when a decision is needed (e.g. who should be a client's selected representative, or if a client is exempted from having their selected representative notified of a suicide attempt).

Health is working with the Department of Education to implement a collaboration guide for mental health and wellness programming in all schools. Staff capacity issues have

delayed the completion of the guide and work is continuing. A draft guide is complete and is anticipated to be finalized in July 2024 for distribution in the 2024/25 school year.

Healthcare Staffing, Emergencies, and Critical Staffing Measures

Vacancy rates for nursing PYs by community, as of February 15, 2024, is as follows:

Community	Total PYs	Permanent¹	Vacant	Casuals	Vacancy Including Casuals
Iqaluit	99	57	42	24	18
Baffin	88	30	59	41	18
Arctic Bay	6	2 ²	5	4	1
Clyde River	8	4	4	3	1
Grise Fiord	3	1	2	2	0
Igloodik	16	6	10	3	7
Kimirut	4	3	1	1	0
Kinngait	10	1	9	2	7
Pangnirtung	15	4	11	11	0
Pond Inlet	11	2	9	9	0
Qikiqtarjuaq	5	2	3	2	1
Resolute Bay	4	2	2	1	1
Sanirajak	6	3	3	3	0
Kitikmeot	60	25	35	25	10
Cambridge Bay	23	7	16	10	6
Gjoa Haven	14	6	8	7	1
Kugaaruk	6	1	5	3	2
Kugluktuk	10	4	6	5	1
Taloyoak	7	7	0	0	0
Kivalliq	90	39	51	39	33
Arviat	14	9	5	4	1
Baker Lake	13	9	4	3	1
Chesterfield Inlet	5	1	4	0	4
Coral Harbour	10	3	7	2	5
Nauyasat	9	4	5	5	0
Rankin Inlet	26	10	16	15	1
Sanikiluaq	7	1	6	3	3
Whale Cove	5	1	4	1	3
Winnipeg	1	1	0	6	0
Nunavut Total	337	151	187	129	79
Occupancy Rate %	44.80%				
Occupancy rate when casuals are included 76.55%					
The staffing numbers are a snapshot and do not reflect usage trends during peak periods.					
¹ Overstaffing is typically coverage for an incumbent on leave or to assist with high demand levels.					
² Job share employees.					

through periods of surges, short staffing, etc. Bonuses have been focused on front-line positions to encourage candidates to work in these critical positions. Vacant non-front-line positions can be filled through other measures, such as contracted services or out-of-territory coverage during the recruitment process.

Prior to the critical staffing measures, bonuses and allowances were only for front-line nurses or those deployed to the front-line as part of their job description. Positions eligible for tiered premium allowances include: the supervisor of health programs, outpatient/inpatient manager, community health nurse, nurse practitioner, public health nurse, psychiatric nurse, midwife, and mental health consultants who are staffed through the Government of Nunavut’s Department of Human Resources. In addition, regional environmental health officers, who are within the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) office, are entitled to critical staffing measures.

There are several positions within the CPHO office that require a nursing degree and license, noted below. These positions are not eligible for the critical staffing measures:

- Communicable Disease Specialist (two positions);
- Territorial Public Health Nursing Consultant; and
- Tuberculosis (TB) Nurse Educator.

Currently, Pond Inlet has 5 days of physician coverage per month, with two permanent physicians located in Iqaluit serving the community and locum coverage while they are on leave. Health would support a permanent physician that would like to practice in Pond Inlet or in any other Nunavut community. There is also a funded Nurse Practitioner position in Pond Inlet. The previous incumbent recently retired. Health is trying to fill this position with casual or agency staff.

Third-Party Funded Positions

There are 123 third-party funded positions. As discussed at Health’s appearance, some positions are funded long-term, and some are term limited. Please see the table below for a breakdown:

	Ending 31 March 2024	Ending 31 March 2025	Ending 31 March 2027	No end date	Total FTEs ¹
1 FTE	1	1	5	104	111
0.5 FTE	0	0	4	20	12
	-	-	-	-	123

¹ FTE = Full time equivalents.

The total number of positions within the Department of Health, as reported in the Main Estimates for 2024/25 and Business Plan for March 31, 2025, is 1372. In *Towards a Representative Public Service* the total number of positions in Health are 1324.7.

There are several factors that may have contributed to the discrepancy, including deactivations or reprofiling of positions which impact the staffing compliment, and

