



**Government of Nunavut
Responses to Recommendations
by the Standing Committee on
Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts,
Dated June 2011**

**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**

TABLED IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
BY THE HONOURABLE TAGAK CURLEY, MLA
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

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Introduction

The Government of Nunavut acknowledges the important role that the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts 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 would like to acknowledge the opportunity to have engaged in a dialogue with the Standing Committee in April 2011 during its hearing on the Auditor General of Canada’s report.

In the Standing Committee’s Report on the Review of the Auditor General of Canada’s report, there were specific references to reporting to the Legislative Assembly that the Department of Health and Social Services (“HSS”) would like to comment upon as follows:

1. On page 5, the Standing Committee notes that it “looks forward to regular updates being tabled in the House on the status of the implementation of the Action Plan”. HSS would like to reiterate the comments made during the hearing that HSS intends to provide regular updates to the House formally and informally during various Committee appearances. The formal update will be on an annual basis; and
2. On page 7, the Standing Committee references 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. It is the intention of HSS to provide relevant information to the House, either in the afore-mentioned regular updates or if appropriate, in the annual reports of the Director of Child and Family Services.

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 has 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 Health and Social Services response:

The Department of Health and Social Services concurs with the additional recommendation made by the Standing Committee.

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 Health and Social Services response:

As noted in HSS’ response to the Auditor General of Canada’s report and in HSS’ Action Plan, the Department will work collaboratively with other departments, such as the Department of Human Resources and the Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth to strengthen the training received by community social service workers.

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 Health and Social Services response:

The Department of Health and Social Services concurs with this recommendation. Should opportunities become available to transition correctional services to the Department of Justice, both departments are amenable to this happening.

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 Health and Social Services response:

This is a relevant point noted by the Standing Committee. As such, the Department of Health and Social Services will consider how to factor in different grades of criminal offences in assessing the eligibility of foster homes or adoptive families.

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 Health and Social Services response:

While the Department of Health and Social Services also recognizes the importance and familial significance of adoption, a comprehensive review of this topic will not occur during the 3rd 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 Health and Social Services response:

The Department of Health and Social Services recognizes the importance of having appropriate information systems in place in order to have relevant and timely information as to the health status of Nunavummiut. HSS is considering how best to implement this recommendation.

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 Health and Social Services response:

The Government of Nunavut, through the Department of Finance, has engaged a consultant to conduct a structural review. This will be an area for the consultant to study and provide a recommendation(s) to the Government of Nunavut on.

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 Health and Social Services response:

The Department of Health and Social Services concurs with the areas of action noted by the Standing Committee.

Concluding Comments

The Department of Health and Social Services notes that the task of addressing the recommendations of the Standing Committee and the Auditor General of Canada will be challenging in light of the current human resource and fiscal capacity reality. However, the Department has begun the task of transforming the current social services structure to a new one that reflects Inuit societal values and is inclusive.

With respect to the Public Health Strategy, the Department has re-examined how it will implement the Public Health Strategy so that it is a success and clear lines of accountability are established.

The Department expects to make progress on children, youth and family programs and services during the remaining term of the 3rd Assembly, with the continued support of the Standing Committee.