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**GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES IMPROVEMENTS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

WHITEHORSE – Health and Social Services Minister Brad Cathers today announced changes to the way mental health services are provided in the Yukon.

A mental health clinician will be located to Dawson City to support people and families with serious mental health problems, train health professionals and build local capacity in creating supportive communities. Although located in Dawson, the nurse-clinician will provide consultations and services to a number of rural communities.

“This is the first step in improving services to communities outside of Whitehorse,” Cathers said. “One of this government’s priorities is to ensure that all Yukon residents have access to appropriate health services. Mental health services are an important part of that access and we are working towards improving care at the community level.”

In addition, the minister pointed to work that has already begun to identify housing options for people with mental illness and to develop an in-patient psychiatric program. Earlier this year, \$50,000 was announced to support this planning process.

“There is general agreement among mental health professionals, family members and caregivers that housing could make a significant difference in the lives of people with serious mental health problems,” Cathers said. He added that the department is also working with Whitehorse General Hospital to plan for dedicated mental health in-patient beds.

The department will also expand Mental Health Services to include a mental health clinician to increase the detection, assessment, treatment and support to young people with psychotic disorders, and their families. The minister said this will increase awareness of early psychosis among young people by educators, professionals and the general public.

These initiatives flow from a report on Yukon’s mental health services prepared by independent consultant Dr. Eliot Goldner, a Faculty of Health Sciences Professor at Simon Fraser University.

In his report, Dr. Goldner said he was “positively impressed with the high quality of services provided in the Yukon to people with mental health and substance use problems. A range of services is available for people with a variety of problems and the services are staffed by a very competent professional staff, applying best practices.”

Supportive housing, in-patient services for individuals with acute mental illnesses and increased services to rural Yukon were all identified in Goldner’s report as resources that would build on – and complement – the professional services already in place.

“These changes are part of our plan for long-lasting improvements to mental health services which will benefit those Yukon residents who need them the most,” Cathers said.

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