3. Supporting High Needs Users

Vision

Yukoners with complex and high needs can access health professionals to provide safe, well-coordinated, cost-effective and high-quality care, and have access to the appropriate health and social services and supports needed to live safe, independent, and comfortable lives.

Why supporting high needs users is important

Some individuals have multiple health and social services needs and may face barriers to accessing needed services. In some cases, programs and services can be redesigned so that individuals receive improved access and outcomes that also improve overall system cost and sustainability.

For example, Yukoners with multiple conditions such as chronic diseases, life-limiting illnesses, mental health challenges, substance use disorder and frailty, and who may also be suffering from socio-economic stress, are not always receiving the appropriate care at the right time.

We have found that, in Yukon, some people with high needs may be using the health and social system with a much higher frequency even though their needs are not being fully met. This does not improve a person's health and wellbeing and also increases costs to the health and social services system.

We do not have all of the information we need to understand who these high needs users are, what their needs are or the many ways they are accessing the system. This is a significant gap in our current system. As a result, we are currently unable to provide effective care to meet all of their needs in the most sustainable way.

High needs users fall into several different categories:

- High user – person who uses many services
- High cost user – person whose total cost of care is high relative to others
- User with unmet needs – person who uses care frequently in attempts to meet needs
- Non-user with unmet needs – person with needs who is not seeking care
How our system works now

Programs and services

Yukoners with high needs may or may not be accessing programs and services and their total cost of care may or may not be relatively high but often their needs remain unmet or underserved.

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS
There are three emergency departments in hospitals in Whitehorse, Dawson City and Watson Lake. The hospitals provide services 24/7 and in addition to emergency care, may provide primary care to those without a family physician or those who cannot access a physician within the timeframe they determine is required.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
This service provides 24 hour service to allow for safe and efficient transportation of people undergoing medical emergencies.

WHITEHORSE EMERGENCY SHELTER
This is a low-barrier shelter that operates based on harm reduction principles and approaches. The shelter was built with a 25-bed capacity. Overflow space is being used to meet the current demand of 50 to 60 people per night. The shelter offers drop-in programming, a meal program, and 20 onsite housing units.

RESPITE AND REABLEMENT PROGRAM
The respite and reablement program at the Thomson Centre provides support after a hospital stay or acute episode. The program provides targeted support to improve an individual’s functioning and helps them learn or re-learn the skills they need for daily life. It offers the opportunity to work with and support an individual out of hospital care before assessing their ability to return home with home care, increasing the likelihood that they will be able to return home with supports avoiding unnecessary and premature entry to long-term care.

PALLIATIVE CARE PROGRAM
This resource team helps individuals with life-limiting illnesses navigate the health care system by giving care providers (professionals, family, friends or volunteers) with support, best practice information, standardized assessment tools and clinical advice to manage pain and suffering at the end of life, while remaining in their location of choice as long as appropriate.
MENTAL WELLNESS AND SUBSTANCE USE
Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services provides a variety of mental wellness, substance and addictions treatment and harm reduction services. The Referred Care Clinic is a primary health care clinic which is designed to meet the needs of patients for whom the symptoms of their mental health and/or substance use prevent them from accessing services in a traditional family practice.

CHRONIC DISEASE PROGRAMS
These programs provide financial assistance for drugs, medical surgical supplies and other medically necessary items for eligible persons who have been diagnosed with a severe disability or one of the chronic diseases listed in the Chronic Disease and Disability Regulations. Self-management support is also offered to Yukoners, and their caregivers, living with diabetes, chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease (CVD) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Possible ways forward for Yukon
In general, Yukoners with high needs may be accessing services at a higher rate and at greater cost than the rest of the population. However they may not always be accessing the right services from the right provider and their needs may remain unmet or underserved.

Here are some of the ideas that were suggested to the panel:

Relationship-based primary care
- Ensure every Yukoner has a primary care home with a doctor or nurse practitioner that employs a relationship-based approach to care.

Whole-person approach to care
- Use a person-centred approach to provide the right service at the right time by the right provider to meet the needs of high users.

Collaborative and person-centred care
- Ensure coordinated and integrated support services and planning are available to Yukoners with multiple needs.
- Expand mental wellness hubs to include other core providers and ensure a more coordinated and regionally-integrated approach.
- Provide more consistent and accessible home and community care.
- Provide effective case-management and wrap-around care to meet the patient/client where they are and ensure their needs are being fully met.
- Work with the community to gather data to understand who the high users are, what their needs are and what programs and services they require.
Questions for discussion

1. What further measures would you suggest to support people who have needs that are not being met in the current system?

2. Should a program with increased hours of access be implemented to allow more access to appropriate services, especially for high frequency users?

3. What is the single most important area we can improve for Yukoners that have medical and social needs that are unmet?