6. Social Supports

Vision
A health and social system that focuses on the social, financial, cultural, and environmental factors that impact our health.

Why social supports are important
There are many things that affect how healthy we are. Our childhoods, income, job security, education, connection with others and community, where we live and whether we have disabilities all play a role in our health. These are called the social determinants of health. The current health and social system is not resourced and structured to completely address these factors.

Investing in these areas can improve the health of Yukoners and save money. The Yukon Financial Advisory Panel acknowledged this in its final report: “...incremental investments in housing and other aspects of social spending have a much bigger impact on health outcomes than a marginal dollar spent on health care facilities and personnel.”

This means that, in the longer term, investing in these social determinants of health has a more positive impact on our health than spending money on hospitals and health care workers.

How it works now

Early Learning and Childhood Development
Access to quality early learning and childhood development programs is important for Yukon children, youth and families.

CHILD CARE SERVICES
Child Care Services works to ensure that affordable, quality child care services are available in the territory. They provide subsidies to parents and caregivers so they can afford positive environments that help their children learn and grow.

Licensed child care services are offered by private businesses and individuals. Finding appropriate space and trained early childhood staff can be challenging. Child Care Services provides grants and works with providers to help them develop high-quality child care services that support and strengthen early learning.

Three rural communities in Yukon (Ross River, Faro, and Beaver Creek) do not have licensed child care facilities. This may prevent parents from re-entering the workforce or pursuing post-secondary education.
HEALTHY FAMILIES
Healthy Families is a free, culturally-appropriate, intensive, home-based program designed to support parents. The program staff work with parents to reduce stress, make parenting more fun, build on strengths and encourage childhood development. The program supports all types of families with children from 0 to 5 years. Currently the program is offered in Whitehorse, Pelly Crossing, Carmacks, Watson Lake, and Old Crow; it will soon be available in Dawson City.

Income
How much money we have has an affect on our health, ability to purchase nutritious food, obtain housing, and impacts our ability to connect with our communities and access programs and services.

INCOME SUPPORT SERVICES
Provides financial assistance to people who do not have enough income to meet their basic needs. Social assistance is generally intended for people who have explored all other possible sources of income. In recent years, requests have become more diverse. As a result, the department has been providing more discretionary and emergency support for health and other high-cost living expenses, like housing.

The current system can’t respond well to Yukon’s unique and changing circumstances. Programs and services do not appear to fit the range and diversity of persons with low income in the territory.

In Yukon, there are three different social assistance providers: the Government of Canada, First Nation governments, and the Government of Yukon. All three follow the Social Assistance Act and regulations, but policies and approaches are not consistent.

YUKON SUPPLEMENTARY ALLOWANCE
The Yukon Supplementary Allowance provides extra financial support for social assistance recipients with severe and prolonged disabilities.

PIONEER UTILITY GRANT AND YUKON SENIORS INCOME SUPPLEMENT
These programs provide income supplements or subsidies to seniors.

- Pioneer Utility Grant: provides seniors with a supplement to help with heating costs.
**Housing**

Inclusive access to safe and affordable housing is an important factor in our health and wellness. For low-income or vulnerable individuals, finding housing can be difficult.

**HOUSING COMMUNITY OUTREACH SERVICES**

This program works with homeless clients to find housing and improve their health outcomes. The clients of this program often need extra support to help them live stable and independent lives in the community.

The program does not have any dedicated housing stock and works to house clients in existing units, primarily in the private market. This can often be a challenge as there is a lack of housing in the territory, with affordable, appropriate, low-barrier options particularly difficult to find.

**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 transitional housing units.

**Individuals with Disabilities**

**DISABILITY SERVICES**

Disability Services helps clients maintain meaningful independence, and supports and promotes social inclusion.

For those under 19, the Children's Disability Services Program provides access to:

- Respite care.
- Family counselling.
- Sibling care and in-home child care services.
- Homemaking services.
- Discretionary funding.

Once 19 and older, the Adult Disability Program provides:

- Funding for rent, day programs and respite.
- Access to an occupational therapist.
- Referrals to community-based supports that help clients live independently in the community.
- Residential care options, if an individual can no longer live on their own or with family. The options available now are limited.
The Developmental Diagnostic Clinic offers Autism Spectrum Disorder assessments for children and youth, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder assessments for adults.

The existing system can be difficult to understand and navigate, especially for individuals with disabilities. Different supports available for children and adults can make it more challenging to understand.

**Employment**

**EMPLOYMENT TRAINING SERVICES**
Clients with employment-related barriers and disabilities can get help to enter or re-enter the workforce. The program matches clients with employment or training opportunities that are in demand in Yukon’s labour market, and meet their career goals, skills and interests.

**NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS**
Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the territory play a critical role in ensuring that Yukoners have access to programming services and supports. NGOs deliver many high-quality, person-centred services and supports that the department does not provide. The main services provided by HSS-funded NGOs are:

- Housing supports and services for vulnerable populations,
- Supports for children and adults with cognitive disabilities,
- Services for seniors, and
- Advocacy and education.

**Possible ways forward for Yukon**

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

**Early Learning and Childhood Development**

- Streamline the system and delivery of early learning and child care programs and services and remove silos that are preventing collaboration.
- Allow for more innovative options for licensed child care in the territory.
- Make child care more accessible and affordable for families.

**Income**

- Update the existing system to better respond to the Yukon context and increased need for discretionary aid. Offer specific programs for rent subsidies, medical needs, utilities, and other common requests.
- Improve the consistency of practice among all service delivery agents.
• Ensure legislation doesn’t restrict First Nations-specific approaches to delivery.

• Explore a system that has a range of income support tools that meet Yukoners’ diverse needs.

**Housing**

• Develop and implement a supportive housing system that works to end and prevent chronic homelessness.

• Consider expanding Housing Community Outreach Services to work with high-risk youth experiencing homelessness.

• Develop an accessible rent supplement program and emergency fund, that is needs based rather than budget based.

• Develop a plan for housing seniors that are experiencing health and mental health challenges.

**Individuals with Disabilities**

• Review and expand eligibility for the programs under Disability Services so programming is consistent and able to adapt throughout a person’s life.

• Develop a self-managed care program to provide more flexible support. Self-managed care is a best practice that many jurisdictions in Canada offer. In these programs the client takes a more active role in their care.

• Partner with First Nation governments to expand culturally appropriate models and options.

**Employment**

• Work with First Nation governments and local employers on formal training initiatives.

• Build capacity to support individuals with employment barriers in the workplace.

• Offer workshops, education, training, and online tools to help individuals overcome barriers and develop the skills to secure long-term, meaningful jobs.
Questions for discussion

1. What further measures can we take to meet the housing and support needs of Yukoners, particularly our most vulnerable?

2. The needs of many low-income Yukoners are diverse, and have changed over the past several years. How can we better meet the needs of low-income Yukoners?

3. Persons with disabilities have a range of special needs that change and evolve over the lifespan. How can we improve the care of persons with disabilities in Yukon?

4. Many Yukoners have educational and employment related barriers. How can we better meet the educational and vocational needs of Yukoners with barriers to employment?

5. Many people need several types of health and social services, such as housing and income support. How well do these services work together today?

6. What’s the most important thing that could be different about social supports (child care, income support and housing) in Yukon?