

Ministre des Services
aux autochtones



Minister of
Indigenous Services

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0H4

JAN 3 1 2019

The Honourable Kevin Sorenson, M.P.
Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts
House of Commons
OTTAWA ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Sorenson:

I am pleased to provide a progress report on the steps taken to support the oral health of First Nations and Inuit populations, as requested in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts' May 2018 report entitled, "Report 4, Oral Health Programs for First Nations and Inuit – Health Canada, of the 2017 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Seamus O'Regan".

The Honourable Seamus O'Regan, P.C., M.P.

c.c.: Ms. Angela Crandall, Clerk of the Committee

Progress Report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Context:

In 2016-2017, the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) of Canada undertook an audit of (then) Health Canada's oral health programs for First Nations and Inuit. The audit sought to determine whether the Department had reasonable assurance that its oral health programs for Inuit and First Nation people had a positive impact in their oral health.

In the fall of 2017, the OAG released the *Report 4, Oral Health Programs for First Nations and Inuit – Health Canada, of the 2017 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada*. The report included six recommendations pertaining to the areas of program administration and data collection and analysis.

In April and May of 2018, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts reviewed the OAG's report and requested responses and progress updates with various deadlines on the six recommendations.

In June 2018, the Minister of ISC responded to two of the six recommendations (recommendations 4 and 5) and in November 2018, the Minister of ISC responded to three additional recommendations (recommendations 1, 2 and 3) as set forth by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Standing Order 108(3)(g).

The following is ISC's report that responds to the last recommendation (recommendation 6) by January 31, 2019 as set forth by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

- Recommendation 6 – that, by January 31, 2019, ISC provide the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report detailing what progress has been made with regard to implementing strategies to ensure that it has the human resources it needs to deliver oral health programs and related services to First Nations and Inuit populations over the long term.

Introduction:

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), through the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB), supports the delivery of public health and health promotion services for First Nations living on-reserve and for Inuit living within Inuit Nunangat.

The Branch also provides drug, dental and ancillary health services to First Nations and Inuit regardless of residence, and primary care services on-reserve in remote and isolated areas, where there are no provincial services readily available.

The most recent oral health surveys (Canadian Health Measures Survey - oral health component¹, the First Nations Oral Health Survey² and the Inuit Oral Health Survey³) found that First Nations and Inuit have nearly twice as much dental disease and more unmet oral health needs compared to other Canadians. ISC invests more than \$230 million annually through the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program (NIHB), the Children's Oral Health Initiative (COHI) and Dental Therapy services to meet the oral health needs of First Nations and Inuit.

Report on Progress:

The Department has ensured that it has the human resources it needs to deliver oral health programs and related services to First Nations and Inuit populations.

The First Nations Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) of Indigenous Services Canada continues to work with partners to develop and advance contingency plans in regions that face position shortages.

The FNIHB's Senior Management Committee approved regional Service Delivery Plans in September 2018, which included a human resources component to address any potential future position shortages, and human resources planning related to the expansion of the Children's Oral Health Initiative to new communities made possible through investments from Budget 2017.

In order to respond to possible future provider shortages, the Department is providing funding to the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) for the development of a curriculum to create a new oral health provider with an expanded scope of practice, as compared to existing dental hygienists. The new curriculum includes hygiene and dental therapy. This in turn, will support the increase of supply of oral health professionals. The goal of creating a new oral health provider with an expanded scope of practice that includes hygiene and dental therapy is to provide access to a broader range of oral health services to underserved populations, particularly First Nations and Inuit. In addition, the CDHA, in the roll out of their curriculum, are looking at strategies that would promote Indigenous participation in the program (e.g., partnering with northern schools and using technology for remote learning).

Furthermore, the Department provided funding to the CDHA to collaborate with the University of Manitoba and Saskatchewan Polytechnic for the creation of the new post-secondary program for the oral health practitioner as a new oral health provider. Representatives from the Assembly of First Nations and the First Nations Health

¹ http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2010/sc-hc/H34-221-2010-eng.pdf

² <https://fnigc.ca/first-nations-oral-health-survey.html>

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada/services/first-nations-inuit-health/reports-publications/health-promotion/inuit-oral-health-survey-report-2008-2009.html>

Authority are members of the steering committee for the development of this curriculum. The Department is also exploring potential opportunities to pilot the CDHA's Oral Health Practitioner Initiative with other interested partners.

Lastly, the Department continues to increase the promotion of its oral health programs at dental associations' conferences, conventions, forums, dental universities and colleges as part of departmental recruitment activities.