

21-20(1)

The Honourable Lesa Semmler
Minister of Health and Social Services

Changes to Child and Youth Counselling Services

Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to Written Question asked by the Member for Yellowknife North on October 23, 2025, regarding Changes to Child and Youth Counselling Services.

The Member asked the Minister to provide the number of children and youth, broken down by community or region, who have been accessing child and youth counselling services over each of the past two years.

Child and youth counsellors reported 4,677 client encounters in 2023-2024 and 2,485 encounters in 2024-2025.

Regional client encounters for 2023-2024 were recorded as follows: Beaufort Delta had 1,198; Dehcho had 322; Fort Smith had 322; Hay River had 222; Sahtu had 170; Tłı̄chǫ had 731; and Yellowknife had 1,712.

Regional client encounters for 2024-2025 were recorded as follows: Beaufort Delta had 462; Dehcho had 0; Fort Smith had 112; Hay River had 34; Sahtu had 72; Tłı̄chǫ had 573; and Yellowknife had 1,232. A significant decrease of approximately 46.87%, in Child and Youth Counsellor contacts with children and youth was observed beginning in the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

There are several factors contributing to the reduction of contacts with children and youth.

In 2024, Health and Social Services and Education, Culture and Employment redesigned mental health services for children, youth, and families redistributing funding across both the education and health systems to ensure a full range of supports were available, from prevention and early intervention to clinical support. As part of this redesign clinical support continues to be provided by the Health and Social Services system through the Community Counselling Program, while prevention and early intervention activities are provided through a school-based mental health and wellness program.

As a result of these changes the number of child and youth counsellors in the health and social services system has been reduced and child and youth counsellors are no longer placed in schools but rather into community settings.

Younger children are unable to leave school without parental support, to attend a counselling session in a Child and Youth Counsellors office; older or mature minor students are still responsible to abide by school attendance policies. The opportunity for confidential, on-site clinical connections has been significantly reduced.

The Child and Youth Counsellor program shifted to a primarily referral-based model, thereby reducing informal accessibility and ease of access for children/youth to simply “drop in” to the office and engage more spontaneously.

The numbers in this response reflect only services provided through the health and social services system.

Child and Youth Counsellor staff have had to re-build relationships with schools and communities, from the previous model of being in schools, to now serving schools part-time, and/or doing outreach to community settings.

The Member asked if the Minister could provide the number of children and youth, broken down by community or region, who previously accessed child and youth counselling services over each of the prior two years before the changes were made in October 2023.

Child and youth counsellors reported 4,486 client encounters in 2021-2022. Regional client encounters were recorded as follows: Beaufort Delta had 819; Dehcho had 267; Fort Smith had 121; Hay River had 0; Sahtu had 258; Tłı̄chǫ had 474; and Yellowknife had 2,547. Data for Hay River was not available as the program was in a stage of early implementation in 2021-2022.

Child and youth counsellors reported 4,917 client encounters in 2022-2023.

Regional client encounters were recorded as follows: Beaufort Delta had 1,018; Dehcho had 271; Fort Smith had 143; Hay River had 258; Sahtu had 255; Tłı̄chǫ had 750; and Yellowknife had 2,222.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.