

Private Members' Business

Inuit youth, suicides in the 15 to 24 year age group are also radically higher than the Canadian average.

There are undoubtedly a number of issues and causes behind these grim statistics, but there can be little question that people who have a reasonable measure of confidence in the future are unlikely to choose to end their lives in violent fashion, particularly in the prime of their youth.

These desperate actions do suggest that education, employment and economic opportunities have been insufficient in too many cases to offer aboriginal youth reason to hope for a better life and a better future. This has to change and this government is committed to ensure that it will indeed change.

In a minute I will be speaking about some of the programs and initiatives which are helping to deal with aboriginal health problems. But the fact remains that the most significant aboriginal health problems are not linked to any disease. They are linked to fundamental economic, social and environmental factors. It will only be through structural change and adjustment in these areas that significant and lasting improvements to the health status of aboriginal peoples can be achieved. This means ensuring that Indian and Inuit communities assume a greater role in the design and delivery of their own health care services in the broader context of self-determination.

Toward this end, the Government of Canada is moving on a number of fronts. First, there is a wide array of federally-funded health services for treaty and for status Indians. As of 1989-90, these services totalled more than \$478 million. They include community health services, dental health services, environmental health and surveillance, non-insured health benefits, the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program, hospital services and capital construction.

These services cover the spectrum of promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative health care. They are responsible, in no small measure, for the significant progress that has been made over the last few decades in improving the health status of Indian and Inuit people.

As I said earlier, the government is determined to work closely with Indian and Inuit communities to put into practice the concepts of community support and

self-determination in health services. It is for this reason that Health and Welfare Canada established and funded program transfers which enable Indian communities to assume responsibility for planning, organizing and implementing their own health services. Five transfer agreements representing 28 bands have been signed to date and others are in the works.

Another example of the government's commitment to promoting aboriginal self-determination in the field of health services is the Indian and Inuit Health Careers Program. Again, through Health and Welfare Canada, this program is helping to correct the under-representation of native people in health care delivery. The program encourages and supports Indian and Inuit participation in the pursuit of post-secondary health careers.

As well, more than \$5 million have been channelled to post-secondary institutions as developmental funding to address the special needs of native students in such career fields as nursing, health education and health administration. These and other health related initiatives have a direct and beneficial impact on the lives of some 274,000 on-reserve status Indians in Canada.

In all, the health services provided both directly and indirectly by the Government of Canada serve the needs of approximately 440,000 treaty and status Indians.

The very size and diversity of our original population, the isolation, and the very different cultural needs of many communities make the design and delivery of health care services a challenge of significant proportions. In large measure, that challenge is being met, but as I said before, no amount of health care, no matter how well designed, funded and delivered, can address problems that arise from social, economic and environmental conditions.

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We must take steps to stop the high rates of violent death and suicide among aboriginal youth. These young people must be able to look to the future with a sense of hope and a legitimate expectation, not only of a healthier but a better life. To bring about this change, we must be prepared to move with all possible speed to help Canada's aboriginal people attain the self-reliance and self-