



**GN Response to Standing Committee Report on the Review of the
2023 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative
Assembly of Nunavut: COVID-19 Vaccines in Nunavut**

Introduction:

The Government of Nunavut (GN) appreciates the opportunity to provide responses to Standing Committee recommendations in their Report on the Review of the 2023 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut: COVID-19 Vaccines in Nunavut. The GN agreed with all the Auditor General's recommendations and looks forward to providing updates to the Standing Committee as requested.

Issue: Commitments to Provide Information

Standing Committee Recommendation #1:

The standing committee recommends that the Government of Nunavut's response to this report include the information items that were committed to during the televised hearing of September 22, 2023

Response:

See below responses to questions raised during the Standing Committee hearing on September 22, 2023.

Mass Vaccination Clinics

Each mass vaccination clinic cost roughly \$1M. This figure is an average for the territory. Costs included in this total include contracts for casual health care staff, administrative contractors, cleaners, transportation and cargo, rental space, equipment, and clinic supplies.

As was shared with the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, it is not possible to pull information from each in-territory flight involved as the flights were multi-functional (e.g., bringing nurses, materials, swabs at the same time).

Statistical Information Weekly Updates

The last numbers on COVID-19 vaccinations and COVID-19 infections in Nunavut were published on April 5, 2022. The Nunavut Public Health Emergency (PHE) ended on April 11, 2022. The decision to stop weekly reporting of COVID-19 cases on the GN website was informed in part by the nearing of the end of the PHE and moving to manage COVID-19 (including reporting) in a similar way to that of other common respiratory diseases in Nunavut. Other jurisdictions were also reducing the frequency of their reporting around this time. Saskatchewan stopped weekly reporting of COVID-19 information in February 2022, otherwise all other provinces and territories continued publishing COVID-19 information past March 2022. This has to do with contextual factors such as the number of active cases in the jurisdiction, population size, and risk level of further outbreaks.

All provinces and territories, including Nunavut, continue to report cases to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC); that reported data is publicly available via the national report – Respiratory Virus Detections in Canada. This report includes weekly and cumulative numbers of cases and tests for Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), influenza, and COVID-19. Nunavut’s weekly COVID-19 activity level is available via the national dashboard – *COVID-19 Epidemiology Update: Summary*.

COVID-19 Vaccine Stock

The total number of COVID-19 vaccine doses in territory as of January 9, 2024, was 7,817. Of these, there are:

- 5,735 doses of the Moderna vaccine (for adults). Note that this vaccine is also used for children 6 months and older (at a lower dose).
- 1,410 doses of the Pfizer bivalent (pediatric).
- 672 doses of the Pfizer bivalent (12+).

Issue: Pandemic Preparedness

Standing Committee Recommendation #2:

The standing committee recommends that the Government of Nunavut’s response to this report include a detailed update on the status of work to update the Department of Health’s health emergency and pandemic plan, including the extent to which this work may require amendments to the *Public Health Act* and the *Emergency Measures Act*.

Response:

Emergency Plan

All GN departments are required to have an Emergency Plan. Health is working together with the Department of Community and Government Services’ Nunavut Emergency Management (NEM) Division in developing Territorial Business Continuity Plans.

Pandemic Plan

Health is updating its pandemic plan. The completion of the pandemic plan has been delayed due to staff capacity and staff turnover. As well, part of the pandemic plan will be informed by the evaluation of Health’s response to COVID-19, which will be completed in Spring 2024.

At this time, Health is not anticipating any amendments to the *Public Health Act* or the *Emergency Measures Act*.

The standing committee further recommends that once the Department of Health’s updated health emergency and pandemic plan has been finalized and approved, that it be made public through tabling in the Legislative Assembly and posting on the department’s website.

Response:

Once finalized and approved, Health will table the pandemic plan and make it available on Health's website.

Issue: Annual Reporting

Standing Committee Recommendation #3:

The standing committee recommends that the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer prepare a final report on the COVID-19 pandemic and state of public health emergency that was in effect between March 20, 2020 and April 11, 2022.

The standing committee further recommends that this report be tabled in the Legislative Assembly at the earliest practicable opportunity.

The standing committee further recommends that the Government of Nunavut's response to this report clarify, in detail, the Department of Health's timeline for preparing and publishing the next annual report under subsection 44(e) of the *Public Health Act*.

Response:

There are several reports Health is mandated to prepare, in accordance with the *Public Health Act*. This includes:

- Section 43(b): The Minister shall prepare an annual report within six months of the end of each calendar year respecting the reportable events, outbreaks, public health emergencies and number of inspections under this Act during the year.
- Section 44(6)(e): The Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) is required to prepare and publish, every two years, a report to the Executive Council regarding the health of people in Nunavut and the Minister is required to table the report in the Legislative Assembly.
- Section 44(6)(j): The CPHO may prepare a report on any matter of concern that, in the sole discretion of the Chief Public Health Officer, should be brought to the attention of the Legislative Assembly and provide it directly to the Speaker.

In response to the first recommendation, regarding a final report on the COVID-19 pandemic, the CPHO has prepared a biennial report, that will be tabled in the Winter 2024 Session, that focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides an epidemiological narrative of the spread of COVID-19 in Nunavut, underlying social determinants for health outcomes, and public health interventions. This is a requirement, as per section 44(6)(e) of the *Public Health Act*.

The new *Public Health Act* came into force in January 2020. Due to COVID-19, there was a delay in drafting and finalizing this report within the two-year timeframe. Having just finalized the first biannual report, which was originally due in 2022, Health is now aiming to finalize the next CPHO biennial report in Fall 2024.

As noted above, the *Public Health Act* also states that the CPHO may report on any matter of concern that should be brought to the attention of the Legislative Assembly. The 2020-21 Report on COVID-19 describes the COVID-19 pandemic in Nunavut, its impact across the territory, and the steps taken to mitigate its impact. The report covers the period from April 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021. It was tabled on September 15, 2021.

The Minister is also required to prepare an annual report under the *Public Health Act*. Since 2020, each report has provided an overview of COVID-19 in Nunavut. These annual reports were tabled on September 15, 2021, November 4, 2022, and November 2, 2023.

Issue: Orientation, Training, Certification and Licensing of Health Care Staff

One of the Auditor General's recommendations was that the Department of Health "should put in place systems to track the completion of orientation and training programs for health care staff, monitor whether their licences and certifications are up to date, and provide regular reports of overdue training and expired licences or certifications."

In its responses to the Auditor General's report, the department indicated that it "will work with the other Government of Nunavut departments on the design of the human resource modules within the newly procured Enterprise Resource Planning system."

The standing committee notes that the Enterprise Resource Planning system project is being managed by the Department of Finance.

Standing Committee Recommendation #4:

The standing committee recommends that the Government of Nunavut's response to this report provide a detailed update on the status of this work.

Response:

The Department of Finance continues its work to implement Oracle Fusion Cloud. While timelines may shift, at the time of writing (early December 2023) the GN plans to start implementing modules related to absence and time management in Winter 2024.

The second release, targeted for Fall 2024, is expected to include features that will support the Auditor General's recommendations related to orientation and training. As an example, Fusion Cloud's "Journey" function will help the GN take new employees through a targeted checklist of tasks they need to complete as part of effective orientation. Separately, Fusion Cloud's Learning module will allow departments to deliver online training to targeted groups of employees, including front-line health care workers. As recommended by the Auditor General, the system will allow the GN to track which employees complete these activities, and on what timelines.

Fusion Cloud also has a module that can track employee credentials and licensing, another of the Auditor General's key recommendations. Before implementing this

module – and in line with the clear guidance that Members of the Assembly provided the Minister of Finance in November 2023 – the GN will focus on establishing the system’s core modules first. The ability to track employee credentials in Fusion Cloud is important, and something Health will encourage the GN to pursue shortly after getting the rest of the main system – notably the payroll and benefit modules – up and running. This third major release is currently planned for Spring 2025.

Issue: Public Health Surveillance System

The *2023 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut: COVID-19 Vaccines in Nunavut* contained a total of four specific recommendations. The Department of Health formally agreed with all of the recommendations.

One of the Auditor General’s recommendations was that the Department of Health “should implement a digital system enabling it to track and report on adverse events and disaggregated data in a complete, consistent, systematic, and timely manner.”

In its responses to the Auditor General’s report, the department indicated that it “commits to commence a planning project for Nunavut’s Public Health Surveillance System in 2023-2024.”

Standing Committee Recommendation #5:

The standing committee recommends that the Government of Nunavut’s response to this report provide a detailed update on the status of this work, including a description of the extent to which it will enhance the department’s capacity in respect to tracking and measuring determinants of health in the territory.

Response:

Public Health Surveillance System

Health has conducted a call for proposals to secure a vendor to assist in establishing a system, including determining its functionality, conducting a needs assessment, and developing a roadmap. Typically, these systems are made up of many modules.

Health has established a working group with staff from Public Health, Clinical Operations, and the Health Information Unit, to provide oversight and guidance.

The first phase of this work is on vaccine and immunization registries.

Adverse Event Tracking and Reporting

Health has been working on adverse event tracking, and to date has focused on automating the collection and transfer of adverse event data rather than a full reporting system. This work has been done in collaboration with the PHAC.

Adverse event tracking and reporting will also be part of discussions regarding the public health surveillance system. As noted above, Health will better understand the

functional requirements of a public health surveillance system once a vendor is selected and work commences on the roadmap. Health anticipates that the work done with PHAC on adverse event data will be built upon.

Issue: Inventory Management

The *2023 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut: COVID-19 Vaccines in Nunavut* contained a total of four specific recommendations. The Department of Health formally agreed with all of the recommendations.

One of the Auditor General's recommendations was that the Department of Health "should implement a digital inventory system capable of tracking medications, including vaccines and related medical supplies, from their entry into the territory to their administration or use."

In its responses to the Auditor General's report, the department indicated that commits to submitting a business case in summer 2023, requesting resources needed to advance a digital tracking system ... As an interim measure, the Department of Health will create a manual tracking system by September 2023."

Standing Committee Recommendation #6:

The standing committee recommends that the Government of Nunavut's response to this report provide a detailed update on the status of this work.

Response:

To support increased traceability, a manual tracking system has been implemented for the COVID-19 vaccines in the territory, through which community health centres (CHCs) submit weekly inventory counts of these vaccines to their regional pharmacy. These values are documented by the regional pharmacies.

An initial demonstration of the Oracle Fusion Cloud (led by Finance) has taken place. Part of this included discussions on how it could support a new GN electronic inventory management system. As noted earlier, the GN is focusing on establishing the system's core modules first. Further review by Health and Finance is planned to confirm integration with Meditech's pharmacy module.

Funding options to support the implementation and use of an electronic inventory management system in-territory continue to be explored.