



Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Health and Environment

**Ministerial Statement to the
House of Assembly
by the Minister of Health, Seniors and Environment
The Honourable Jeanne J. Atherden, JP, MP
On 21st November, 2014**

“An Update on the National Office for Seniors and the Physically Challenged”

Mr. Speaker,

While there has been some recent press coverage relating to the operations of the National Office for Seniors and the Physically Challenged within the Ministry of Health, Seniors and Environment, I rise this morning to update this Honourable House and then the public on what steps have been taken to address the functionality of this Office and improve its service.

The review of the National Office for Seniors and the Physically Challenged by the Management Consulting Section of the Cabinet Office started earlier this year continues with an initial draft of the finding to be submitted by the end of this year.

Mr. Speaker,

While the review is being conducted the positions held by the three most senior staff of the National Office for Seniors and the Physically Challenged have not been filled rather staff from other Government Departments have been seconded to ensure the continuation and continuity of service operations as well as preserve future organizational flexibility.

We need to ensure that the role, responsibilities and organizational structure of the Office are clearly defined and understood – both by the staff, the Bermudians who use the services provided by the Office, and the public at large.

Mr. Speaker,

We have been fortunate to have Ms. Katherina Gibbons (Social Worker) from the Department of Child & Family Services move into the role of Coordinator for Seniors.

Ms. Karen McCottry (Administrator) from the Orange Valley Centre has taken on the role of Coordinator for Disabled and, finally, Ms. Keeona Belboda (Administrator) from Opportunity Workshop has been seconded to the role of Acting Manager for the National Office for Seniors and the Physically Challenged and she now assumes the role of Registrar of Senior Abuse.

Combined, these ladies come with a wealth of knowledge and hands on experience in dealing with our senior and disabled populations and they are committed to meeting best practice standards within the organization.

Mr. Speaker,

We are currently reviewing the Residential Care Homes and Nursing Homes Act and Regulations and we have instituted regular monthly meetings with the Administrators of residential care homes to encourage them to collaborate and share information.

Additionally, we have implemented a process of the monthly reporting of complaints to have an ongoing complaints register. Further, in terms of visits and inspections, changes have been made to the Residential Care Facilities visiting process so they now occur three times per year, two scheduled and one unscheduled. This process will assist with ensuring that all homes comply with the requirements and of the legislation.

Mr. Speaker,

While utilizing the resources that are available to us within the Ministry, we have transferred a vehicle from the Orange Valley Centre to the National Office and as of this week, it is now dedicated to the organization to ensure we can better service the community and be readily available to access clients as needed.

To provide further support, the Orange Valley Centre's social worker will be relocated to NOSPC three days a week to provide support to the Case Management Team in order to assist with cases in a more timely and efficient manner.

Mr. Speaker,

I have concerns about the current practice of NOSPC being responsible for the licensing and inspecting of care homes and also being the recipient of complaints for those same homes. In my view, these roles should be separated and I have asked staff how a separation can be accomplished.

Mr. Speaker,

Going forward, we at the Ministry will also be focusing on improving the quality of care being provided at residential care homes. We have to be concerned about both the physical environment of facilities, but at the same time we need to ensure that the quality of care is of the highest standard.

Our legislation speaks mostly to staffing levels, environmental conditions and the physical environment provided at homes, but the quality of care provisions are not sufficiently strong. We will be discussing, with Administrators, the benefits to be gained by introducing Care Quality Standards through legislation or by establishing a certification or accreditation programme for Residential Care Homes in Bermuda.

In this way, we can ensure that facilities that provide residential care for our most vulnerable populations are of the highest possible quality.

Mr. Speaker,

I believe that improved communication is an essential part of the changes that we are making to the process especially as it relates to the senior abuse complaints/investigative procedures. Persons who make complaints do so out of concern for the individual and we will ensure that as part of our service they will be advised when and why cases are closed or referred to another agency for action.

Mr. Speaker,

We continue to receive input from stakeholders regarding how the service that the National Office for Seniors and the Physically Challenged provides and how the patient quality of life can be improved. We welcome their input and believe that our actions demonstrate that we are either moving forward with proposed changes or are prepared to consider them.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**