

Homelessness Prevention:

Supporting Pathways to Housing NWT Residents

For many residents, home is a place of family, love and comfort. It's where people are connected to their cultures and communities. Yet, far too many people in the Northwest Territories (NWT) do not have a home to call their own. Each person in the NWT deserves the dignity of a home. Through a culturally safe, coordinated all of territory approach, it is possible to prevent homelessness.

The Standing Committee on Social Development

The Standing Committee on Social Development (Committee) is a group of regular Members of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly that engage with residents on social issues, including Government policies and legislation. Through this engagement, Committee makes recommendations to the Government to improve its services, policies, and laws to better serve residents.

Homelessness Prevention

Committee identified housing and homelessness prevention as a priority to focus on given the high rates of unaffordable and overcrowded housing in the NWT. Homelessness prevention refers to policies, practices and interventions that prevent a person from experiencing (or re-experiencing) homelessness, and providing necessary resources and supports needed now. Committee believes that the pathways out of homelessness are achievable.



Understanding Experiences of Homelessness in the NWT

The NWT is facing an unprecedented housing crisis directly connected to a rising number of people experiencing homelessness. In 2021, the City of Yellowknife counted 312 individuals as experiencing homelessness. Of those 312 individuals, 91.5% of persons self-identified as Indigenous; 62% had one or more of their parents attend residential school; and 93% of persons were not originally from Yellowknife.

Given half the NWT population is Indigenous, the causes and risk factors contributing to experiencing homelessness align with the legacy of colonization.

Homelessness exists all over the NWT. However, there is no territory wide publicly available data or reports to understand the different experiences of homelessness and its scope across the NWT. The NWT's primary source of data on homelessness is the City of Yellowknife.

Committee Engagement

Committee heard directly from NWT residents about their experiences with homelessness. For some, their experiences with homelessness were visible, like sleeping on the street or using emergency shelters. For others, their homelessness experiences were hidden, like couch-surfing or living in overcrowded homes. Many people experience constant threats to their housing stability.

More than 165 people shared their perspectives and lived-experience with Committee in community meetings, presentations, written submissions and an anonymous survey.

Committee Recommendations

Committee made 18 recommendations to the Government based on five themes:



Lifting Children and Youth in Care

1 Housing NWT establish a youth housing fund by the 2023-2024 fiscal year with sustainable, multi-year funding available to Indigenous governments and non-governmental organizations to purchase, operate and manage safe housing for children and youth in care.

2 Department of Health and Social Services create an Indigenous Child and Family Services Navigator position dedicated to youth who are aging out of care find stable housing and other supports.

3 Municipal and Community Affairs lead an all-of-government approach to ensuring all children and youth have access to sports with increased funding, subsidies and vouchers for sports equipment and registration fees.

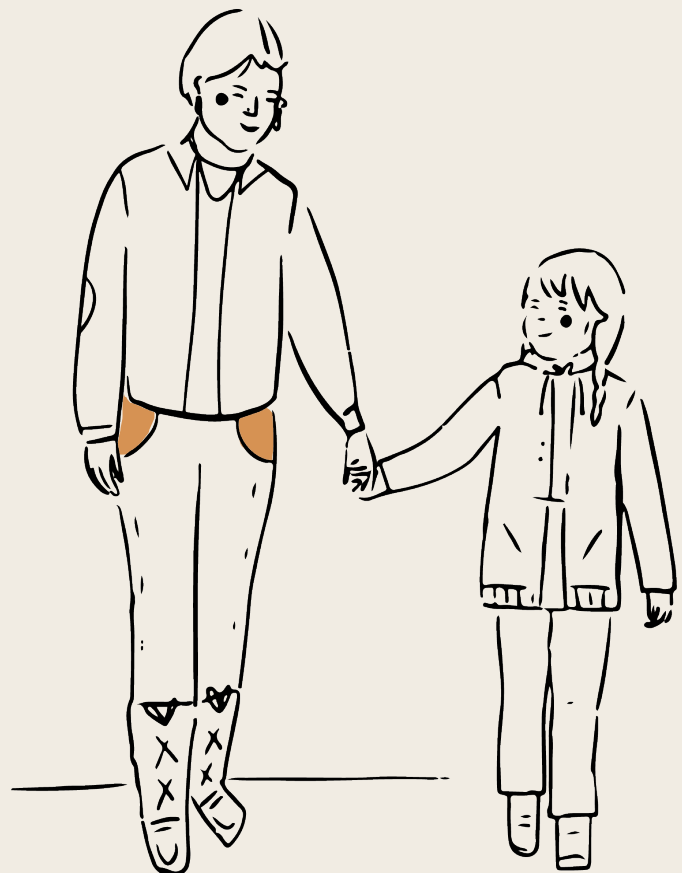


Supporting Gender Equity: Women, 2SLGBTQIPA+ and Gender Based Violence

4 Housing NWT establish a women's housing fund by the 2023-2024 fiscal year that provides sustainable, multi-year funding to Indigenous governments and non-profit organizations to purchase, operate and manage housing for women and their children who are at risk of violence or have experienced violence.

5 Department of Health and Social Services lead the development of 2SLGBTQIPA+ guidelines for emergency shelters, transitional housing and non-profit organizations providing housing and homelessness prevention supports by the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

6 Department of Justice increase funding to the Men's Healing Fund to support regional healing programs for the holistic health and well-being of men throughout the territory.



Supporting Holistic Health: Mental Health, Addictions and Healing

7 Government complete Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action #21 and secure substantive federal funding for an NWT Indigenous healing center located in the NWT to support Indigenous individuals who have been harmed and/or traumatized by the Indian Residential School system, Sixties Scoop and other acts of colonization.

8 Department of Health and Social Services expedite the application, approval and reporting requirement process of the On the Land Healing Fund to uphold Indigenous governments' and organizations' self-determination and ensure allocation of annual funds.

9 Government take an all-of-government approach to providing sustainable, multi-year funding for emergency shelters, transitional housing with wrap around sobriety and mental health supports, and supported living housing with managed alcohol and harm reduction programs.



Indigenous Self-Determined Housing

10 Housing NWT work with Indigenous Governments and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to establish an Indigenous Housing Fund that will provide Indigenous Governments and/or Indigenous non-governmental organizations financial support to purchase, operate and manage housing aimed at Indigenous individuals and families.

11 GNWT work with Indigenous Governments, architects, engineers, and other professionals to develop a suite of Indigenous-led, climate change responsive designs for emergency shelters, transitional housing, affordable housing, housing for seniors and housing for those with disabilities.



Policy and Systems Reform

12 Government meet its commitment to develop an all of government homelessness prevention strategy by April 2023.

13 Department of Education, Culture and Employment partner with the northern private sector, non-governmental organizations, and Indigenous Governments to develop one-year lease agreements and rental assistance payments to accommodate private sector lease requirements to support housing partnerships and increase access to affordable housing.

14 Housing NWT amend the Collection Policy and forgive any arrears up to \$30,000 for Indian Residential School survivors as an act of reconciliation before the end of the 19th assembly.

15 Housing NWT implement the principles of the Collections Policy and develop a strategy by the 2023-2024 fiscal year to forgive arrears that cannot be collected despite demonstrated effort.

16 Housing NWT eradicate the Residency Policy and update the Public Housing Point Rating System with community membership as an additional factor with corresponding points and significant weight.

17 Housing NWT develop a first right of refusal clause in leasing agreements to ensure family members of tenants receive the first opportunity to lease a public housing unit before the unit goes to market.

18 The Committee recommends the Government provide a response to this report in 120 days.



Learn More

To read the full report, including how the recommendations relate to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Canada Calls to Action, and the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, go to ntassembly.ca/HomelessnessPrevention.

