



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to
Motion 58-19(2): Strategy to Match Canada's Population Growth**

Motion

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Yellowknife North, that this Legislative Assembly calls upon the Government of the Northwest Territories to create a comprehensive strategy to match Canada's population growth;

AND FURTHER, that this strategy aimed to sustain the population of each community and grow the territory's overall population by 25 percent by 2043;

AND FURTHERMORE, that this strategy is linked with a goal to add at least 3,700 new homes, or 25 percent, by 2043 and an update to each community's housing plan to make this priority;

AND FURTHERMORE, that this strategy brings together existing policies, programs, and campaigns aimed at keeping residents in the North and attracting new residents;

AND FURTHERMORE, that this strategy includes:

- *an analysis of what brings people to the North;*
- *an analysis of what keeps residents in the North;*
- *a plan to address the increasing cost of living to keep residents in the North;*
- *an immigration strategy;*
- *a communication strategy to attract people to the North; and*
- *a review of business programs to help residents establish and grow their business in the North;*

AND FURTHERMORE, that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a comprehensive response to this motion within 120 days.

GNWT Response

On June 3, 2015, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) tabled *GROWING THE NWT: SUPPORTING POPULATION GROWTH OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES*. This plan identified a strategy for the GNWT to increase its population and to support existing residents in being able to stay within their communities.

Growing the NWT set out three priorities:

- Creating the right environment for both the private and public sectors to retain employees by providing quality government programs and services that will encourage people to live and work in the NWT;
- Influencing private sector recruitment through the marketing of the NWT as a great place to live and work;
- Improving actions to both recruit and retain employees in the GNWT workforce.

While *Growing the NWT* did not reach its goal of increasing the NWT population by 2000 people between 2014 to 2019, it did set a path for the GNWT to use as a guide for its work. The Strategy informed the development of recruitment and retention programs and highlighted the importance of pursuing strategic projects such as the Aurora College Transformation. The 2015 Strategy also outlined important areas for action that the GNWT continues to use to develop programs and deliver services that make the NWT a desirable place to live and call home.

The exercise of developing another strategy to encourage population growth will not necessarily provide new answers to the issue of sustainable economic development. This is an issue being faced by many other jurisdictions and encouraging population growth is only part of the answer.

It is also important to note that the priorities in the 2015 Strategy, as well as the programs that are detailed in this response to support population growth, all relate to activities that are fundamental government functions. They are programs and activities that this territorial government must provide in order to make the Northwest Territories an attractive option for people to live.

Population growth is critical in the North and departments are undertaking a number of projects and programs to support the goal. To refocus resources on developing a new strategy would take away from the work currently being done in departments to advance the overarching goal of population growth and economic sustainability. A new strategy is also unlikely to yield different answers than those provided in *Growing the NWT*, which set the course. A strategy to match Canada's population growth at this time would divert resources from the programs and policies the GNWT is already implementing to make the NWT an attractive place to work, live and invest in. It is by focusing on these existing efforts that the NWT can encourage population growth.

Population in the NWT is expected to grow slower than the rest of Canada and in some communities, the population is expected to decline. It is a reality that residents may leave their community to take advantage of other opportunities because there are insufficient economic resources available to them and their families. Lack of housing and jobs are key reasons why people may leave the NWT, and the GNWT is aware of this reality. Housing NWT and the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI) continue to work to meet the demand for housing and to increase the economic opportunities available in smaller communities.

The Territorial Financing Formula and transfers from the federal government are the main source of funding for the NWT. Population growth is one way to increase federal transfer payments and revenues, but other economic measures should also be encouraged to reduce fiscal dependence on the federal government and diversify territorial funding streams.

The GNWT has an Immigration Strategy in place, led through the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, that we continue to implement but are looking to review with an eye for renewal. The Strategy is set to conclude at the end of 2022, and its renewal will provide a potential future opportunity to understand barriers and make informed recommendations on how to best encourage and support immigration. A focus on ensuring that current NWT residents remain positioned to benefit from increasing employment opportunities will be important in order to maintain ongoing public support for immigration in the Northwest Territories.

Housing supply and affordability is already an issue in the NWT with our current population, and Housing NWT is focusing on providing sufficient and adequate housing to residents of the NWT. Attracting new residents to communities starts with providing adequate housing for existing residents and making communities desirable places to call home.

Growing the NWT focused on the following key activities that contribute to an environment for population growth:

1. Investing in strategic infrastructure projects;
2. Educating, training and developing a skilled workforce;
3. Supporting increased business investment to diversify our economy;
4. Advancing the NWT's natural resource potential;
5. Reducing the cost of living through targeted investments; and,
6. Maintaining quality programs and services for our residents.

These key activities continue to inform the GNWT actions to encourage people to live and work in the North and contribute to a secure economic base for the NWT.

Challenges and limitations

The GNWT is aware that cost of living is a concern in the NWT, as it is in the rest of Canada, particularly given recent inflationary pressures. Living in a remote jurisdiction already comes with higher costs of living and part of our population growth strategy is to retain the residents we already have.

As a government, providing quality services to individuals and families, improving infrastructure, supporting the business sector and reducing the cost of living are all significant issues related to keeping people in the NWT. As an employer, the GNWT has numerous programs intended to support retention. The challenge for the public and private sector is made more difficult because other regions in Canada are also experiencing declining populations, putting us in direct competition for skilled labour.

Population growth in our communities will mean communities need to be prepared for the additional resources and impact of additional people. Key portions of funding for communities are based on population and the GNWT will need to be able to access additional resources to accommodate growth in population. The impact of new residents is more than just additional benefits but also come with additional resource use and pressure on communities and infrastructure, which may push costs higher than the economic benefit from additional residents.

The GNWT continues to face challenges in attracting talented individuals to apply and accept positions with the organization. These challenges have led to vacancies that impact the delivery of programs and services to residents of the NWT and the ability for GNWT employees to meet operational and strategic goals.

The GNWT continues to develop tools and strategies aimed at the recruitment, retention, and development of high-quality employees to enable proactive succession planning and the reduction of existing and anticipated vacancies that have been proven hard to fill.

A shortage of health and social service professionals across Canada has resulted in increased reliance on locum and short-term health care professionals. This shortage has also had a direct impact on the ability to effectively deliver programs and services to the residents of the NWT.

Programs that support population growth

Creating an environment that actively attracts and retains residents in the NWT forms the basis of many activities that GNWT departments currently undertake to foster population growth and the theme identified in *Growing the NWT* are still the framework to which the basis for GNWT activities are formed.

1. Investing in strategic infrastructure projects:

Housing NWT: Housing NWT continues to collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to enhance the availability of affordable housing in the NWT, to make the NWT an attractive place for migrants and to stem population loss to the south.

Housing NWT continues to operate and maintain over 2400 social and public housing units throughout the territory primarily located in smaller remote communities. A core needs analysis was updated in 2022 to better understand the investment required in the NWT to address housing adequacy, affordability, and suitability. Housing NWT is adding 100 units to its public housing stock over the life of the 19th Assembly and intends to make available existing public housing units to individuals who are long term tenants and who wish to purchase their units and be homeowners.

All Housing NWT programs and policies are being reviewed to ensure that residents who require program and service support the most are targeted. Housing NWT is building partnerships and seeking to support Indigenous Governments who recently received distinctions-based funding and can invest in housing and infrastructure in their communities. Investments are being made in apprenticeships and in order to support investments that are staying with northern contractors for goods and services. This investment helps to keep residents in NWT communities and hopefully also attract new residents to some of those same communities.

Investing in Canada Infrastructure Plan: Improving our infrastructure has a long-term impact on economic and population growth. The GNWT continues to implement the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Plan agreement, including processing applications, confirming contribution agreements with communities, and applying Canada's consultation requirements. In March 2018, the GNWT entered into an Integrated Bilateral Agreement with the Government of Canada for funding for Phase II of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Plan. Phase II includes a federal contribution of \$570 million for NWT infrastructure projects, of which \$117 million is allocated to communities.

Communications Infrastructure: Extending the Mackenzie Valley Fibre Link (MVFL) from Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk to provide state-of-the-art broadband connectivity to the community of Tuktoyaktuk, completing the original vision of the MVFL. The GNWT has received preliminary funding approval from the federal government to receive 75% capital dollars towards the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk fibre line project.

Broadband: The GNWT purchases managed services from Northwestel in order to deliver GNWT services in all communities. GNWT offices, schools, and health centres are all connected to the GNWT portion of Northwestel's network in all communities. The GNWT agrees that broadband prices are not affordable and increased competition may decrease prices. The GNWT continues to engage with the Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunication Commission and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada to advocate for increased competition to support affordability of broadband services. Northwestel continues to expand 50/10 service to all communities in the NWT. Completion of this project has been delayed and linked to deployment of Low Earth Orbiting (LEO) satellite technology in Canada. Completion of this deployment is expected 2024 or later, however the GNWT continues to monitor and support Northwestel on this project.

Strategic Projects: The Department of Infrastructure is advancing strategic infrastructure projects that will help provide the foundational infrastructure to support an improved quality of life and lower cost of living for NWT residents, as well as support the expansion and diversification of the economy. The GNWT is working with Indigenous Governments in the area to advance the Taltson Hydro Expansion project to provide better access to clean power and stabilize the energy system within the NWT. This project would see the construction of a second hydroelectric facility at the existing site, along with the construction of a new transmission line that would connect the two hydro systems in the Territory. This project is a promising option for delivering sustainable and stable power to the NWT. Once complete, it will stabilize energy, and reduce the cost of living and doing business in the Territory. Currently, the NWT has the second highest electricity rates in the country. The Department of Infrastructure is also advancing a number of initiatives under the Energy Strategy which are aimed at benefiting residents and making our electricity system more reliable, which in turn improves the quality of life for residents.

2. Educating, training, and developing a skilled workforce

Although the NWT offers competitive post-secondary student financial assistance, degrees are often not aligned to the labour market needs. The NWT requires more graduates from post-secondary studies in science, engineering, nursing, information technology, project management, and finance to meet the growing labour shortage. Investment in the planned NWT polytechnic post-secondary institution is critical to reinforce the Territorial knowledge economy and attract 'innovation dollars'.

Aurora College Transformation: The transformation of Aurora College to a unique northern polytechnic university will contribute to the retention of NWT residents who will have access to post-secondary opportunities that will result in residents being the first in line for northern jobs. Additionally, students from outside the territory and potentially outside of Canada will want to take the opportunity to study in Canada's North. As the polytechnic university grows, more faculty and staff positions will be created, and some will likely be filled by individuals from outside the NWT. As part of the transformation process, four initial areas of teaching and research specialization have been identified; Skilled Trades and Technology; Earth Resources and Environmental Management; Northern Health, Education and Community Services; and Business and Leadership.

Student Financial Assistance: The Student Financial Assistance (SFA) program can be used as a tool for recruitment and/or retention. The SFA program offers eligible residents a variety of non-repayable grants and student loans to assist with the costs associated with obtaining a post-secondary education. In addition, the SFA program has a variety of loan repayment incentives to alleviate the burden of student loan debt upon ceasing full-time studies and to encourage northern students to return and reside in the NWT. These incentives, which were enhanced in 2015 in response to Growing the NWT, include zero percent interest, forgiveness on remissible loans, and the Northern Bonus, and are available to students returning to the NWT upon completing full-time studies.

Educator Development, Recruitment and Retention: Teacher recruitment, retention and development activities that may support population growth and contribute to a strong foundation for an educated population. Some of the recruitment and retention programs developed by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment include:

- *Teacher Induction and Mentorship Program:* where educators who are new to the NWT are paired up with an experienced teacher and supported for their first year. This creates an opportunity for collaboration, connection, support and retention.
- *New to the NWT Educators' Conference:* New teachers are invited to participate in an annual conference focusing on key topics relevant to new hires, such as the history of the NWT, curriculum and assessment, inclusive schooling, trauma-informed practice, and Indigenous languages and education.
- *Professional Development Opportunities:* A range of professional development and training courses for educators are offered throughout the school year, including online courses, virtual conferences and meetings, and in-person events on specific topics.
- *Job Fairs (Recruitment):* Virtual job fairs for educators are one of the ways the GNWT recruits teachers. Education bodies are responsible for their own hiring, however the Department of Education, Culture and Employment provides supports where required.

3. Supporting increased business investment to diversify our economy

Regional economic development plans (REDP): REDPs are in progress and will lay the foundation for achieving economic growth and diversification for the NWT. It is anticipated that population growth will be a facet of the REDP as it helps lay the foundation for economic growth. Once the plans are complete, they can be used as a guide by all invested partners to expand and diversify their regional economies. Each region is unique, with their own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. By working with partners and key stakeholders in each region, the REDPs will identify short, medium, and long-term opportunities that will create meaningful and systematic change and growth in all our communities.

The REDPs will include:

- A snapshot of current economic conditions in each of the regions, including a narrative accompanied by data reflecting regional economic indicators;
- A set of actions to take advantage of regional strengths, address weaknesses, benefit from outside opportunities and avoid threats ; and,
- Recommendations for creating employment and economic opportunities in the regions. The list will identify opportunities for potential investment, prioritized by likelihood of success and highest expected economic impact.

Immigration and the NWT Nominee Program (NTNP) – The Department of Education Culture and Employment (ECE) administers the NTNP’s Employer-Driven Stream, which supports employers in recruiting and retaining foreign nationals when no northerner or Canadian is available. ITI administers the Business Stream, designed to attract entrepreneurs with business expertise and investment capital to settle in the NWT and enhance the economic environment of the NWT by purchasing, starting, or investing in a local business.

In September 2022, ECE introduced enhancements to the NTNP. This included:

- Changes to its Existing Employer-Driven Stream to facilitate employers’ access to the program which included:
 - reducing the language proficiency applicants must demonstrate to be approved;
 - reducing the number of hours considered to constitute a full-time job from 37.5 to 30 hours per week; and
 - reducing advertising requirements for employers.

- The introduction of a new Francophone Stream to assist employers in filling workforce gaps with qualified Francophone foreign nationals. This stream will allow employers to recruit bilingual foreign nationals already in Canada or living abroad by providing them with a Work Permit Support Letter and a Nomination Letter. Following the nomination, the nominee will access a work permit with the Government of Canada, enabling them to enter Canada and come work in the NWT. During the wait period for permanent residency, the applicants must work for their nominating employer until they access Permanent Residency. At the moment, the processing time for Permanent Residency applications with the Government of Canada is about 25 months, giving time for the employer to build a relationship with their staff, supporting retention and bettering the chances of the nominee to stay in NWT following the reception of their Permanent Residency.

The NWT Innovation Action Plan: This plan will address collaboration; skilled worker development and attraction, research, development, and commercialization; entrepreneur and business development; and connectivity; all key features of a diverse economy. This in turn can promote the NWT as an ideal place to live and work with the aim of attracting new residents to the Territory. There are direct actions in the Innovation Action Plan related to attracting skilled workers by positioning the NWT as a great place to live and work and addressing factors such as housing that may constrain the attraction and retention of such workers.

Red Tape Reduction Group: In February 2021, the Department of Finance created a Red Tape Reduction Working Group composed of GNWT employees from Finance, ITI and Infrastructure, two business representatives and an NWT Association of Communities representative to support small businesses by reducing red tape and regulatory burdens. The Red Tape Reduction Working Group does this by asking businesses to send red tape examples to the Working Group so that it can help solve the regulatory problems that business sees as the most irritating. An email address and survey are provided to make it easy for businesses to provide examples. The Red Tape Reduction Working Group meets to address examples of red tape reduction provided and makes recommendations to departments to find ways to reduce the red tape. A progress report from its inception to April 2022 has been posted on the Red Tape webpage.

Procurement: Procurement Shared Services (PSS) provides free contracting workshops for northern businesses on a regular basis. These workshops cover:

- The GNWT competitive procurement process;
- The Business Incentive Policy (BIP) and how to fill out BIP forms correctly;
- The Northern Manufactured Products Policy;
- Information on bidding; and
- How to use the e-Procurement contract opportunities interactive webpage.

In support of smaller communities, PSS sends public notices of advertised tenders to band, hamlet or settlement offices to post in the community where the work is to be performed. The Department also posts public notices on the GNWT Contracts Opportunities webpage. The Department has developed a one-stop-shop webpage, where all GNWT procurement related information are accessible in a central location online. The GNWT routinely supports Northern companies seeking funding from the Federal Government on broadband Internet access services, wireless networks and other telecommunication matters. By supporting businesses in the NWT, we can support population growth to create an economic base to attract investment and workers.

Federally Approved Northern Cannabis Producers: 2022-23 saw the establishment of the NWT's first federally approved cannabis producer. NTLCC continues to support and work with the local producer to purchase, sell, classify, and distribute locally produced cannabis in the NWT.

4. Advancing the NWT's natural resource potential

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources has a mandate for sustainable development and is a contributor to employment in small communities through Territorial Protected Areas, waste reduction and diversion programs, forest industry and fire operations, and research and monitoring programs. These programs support approximately 800 jobs (GNWT and non-GNWT) on a one time, part time, seasonal and full time basis in small communities with opportunities for growth in the future. ENR will continue to support employment growth through opportunities related to territorial protected areas, including guardian programs, and through support for the forest industry and the expansion of waste diversion programs.

Community Harvester Program (CHAP): CHAP is a longstanding program that provides support for hunting, trapping and other harvesting in the NWT. CHAP promotes and supports the continuation of traditional practices, land-based livelihoods, and the traditional economy. CHAP provides funding to Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations, renewable resource councils, and hunters and trappers committees across the NWT to help offset costs associated with harvesting. Each recipient decides how to use the money to support their members. The money can be used for hunting, trapping and other harvesting activities, promoting traditional practices, land-based livelihoods, and food security.

Development Infrastructure: By providing reliable access to power, the development of electricity generation projects, like the Taltson, new mines and projects can be enticed to start their businesses in the Territory. The Mackenzie Valley Highway, and the Slave Geological Province Corridor project will help support critical mineral exploration by constructing the key national trade corridors to open up the Territory and to encourage investment from the industry. They will also create new jobs and millions in wages and contracts for NWT residents and businesses, thus encouraging population growth across the territory.

5. Reducing the cost of living through targeted investments

Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons Property Tax Relief Program: This program helps seniors and persons with disabilities to age in place or continue to live at home by reducing some of the financial pressures of owning their home. The Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons Property Tax Relief Program reduces property taxes paid by seniors and persons with disabilities.

Senior Home Heating Subsidy (SHHS): The SHHS assist low to moderate income seniors who are 60 years of age or older, own their own home or are renting a self-contained unit in the NWT and meet a financial income test. It is intended to help low to modest income seniors offset the costs of heating their homes/units.

Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit: The NWT Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit (SCSB) provides financial assistance to help low income NWT Seniors to pay for living costs. The program provides a monthly cash payment to low-income seniors who are receiving the Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) or the Spouse's Allowance (SA) from the Federal Government.

NWT Child Tax Benefit: The NWT Child Tax Benefit provides low-to-modest income families with monthly cash payments to assist with the costs of raising children. It is a non-taxable benefit that is based on the number and ages of children in a family, as well as family net income declared in the previous year's income tax return. The Benefit is administered by the Canada Revenue Agency on behalf of the GNWT.

Building community capacity to support growing communities: The GNWT supports the mandate to reduce the Municipal Funding Gap by seeking new funding to reduce the gap and undertaking actions in the GNWT Waste Management Strategy, Asset Management Strategy and Climate Change Strategy.

Northwest Territories Child Benefit: The Child Benefit program provides non-taxable benefits to low-income families with children under the age of eighteen based on the number of children and their ages, and family net income declared in the previous year's income tax return. Families with annual net income under \$30,000 will receive the full child benefit. The benefit will start to be phased out when family income exceeds \$30,000 and will be eliminated when family income reaches \$80,000.

Land transfers to community governments: The Department of Lands (DOL) works with other GNWT departments to ensure that land parcels can be transferred, as requested, to community governments. This can allow communities access to more land in order to support additional housing, infrastructure and support services, and business development, to support population growth increases.

Equity lease initiative: The transfer equity leases within community boundaries fee is simple in a way that is transparent, consistent, and considerate of the views of Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations. Giving greater land tenure certainty to residents, which will provide long term certainty of tenure and access to financing, is intended to promote investment to support housing and business development.

Land Lease-Only Policy review/amendments: The Department of Lands is conducting a review to evaluate the effectiveness of the GNWT's Land Lease-Only Policy, taking into consideration all public interests, including economic interests and housing opportunities within communities. The goal is to see if changes to the policy could allow more access to fee simple land for residents, which could provide long term certainty of tenure and access to financing, in order to promote investment to support housing and business development.

Public housing land tenure transfer: The transfer of multi-use residential dwellings in fee simple to Housing NWT and to identify untenured Housing NWT structures and work to assign Housing NWT leases to current residents. Giving greater land tenure certainty to Housing NWT clients can provide long term certainty of tenure and access to financing which will promote investment to support housing and the development and growth of the private housing market.

6. Maintaining quality programs and services for our residents.

Early Learning and Child Care: ECE recognizes that access to early learning and child-care programs support employment and, as such, can support population growth as individuals with young children move to the NWT to work. ECE has been offering the Early Childhood Staff Grant as a wage top-up paid directly to early childhood educators working directly with children in centre-based programs.

In response to the expressed need for increased wages to address the gap between early childhood educators and those working in other roles, such as Education Assistants and teachers in the school system, ECE will be introducing a Retention Incentive in fall 2022 that is intended to enhance wages for early childhood educators working in centre-based programs. As with the Early Childhood Staff Grant, this wage top-up is intended to support retention and recruitment efforts in licensed centre-based programs. This incentive may indirectly support increased access to licensed programs for families with young children, as stability with staffing supports towards the sustainability of licensed programs overall.

Enable seniors to age in place with dignity: Providing appropriate supports to seniors can help them stay in the NWT when they otherwise would have to consider leaving the NWT to access essential services. A priority of the 19th Legislative Assembly is to enable seniors to age in place with dignity.

This mandate has several additional priorities to address key areas that impact the ability of seniors to age in place. These include, but are not limited to:

- Affordability of housing and reducing core housing need;
- Reducing the municipal funding gap;
- Reducing the cost of living; and,
- Increasing food security.

The Department of Health and Social Services is collaborating across the GNWT and with key stakeholders to identify gaps in our services, develop a Northwest Territories Seniors' Strategy, and make resources available to communities through an Age Friendly Community Grants program.

Promoting age-friendly communities is a key activity to achieve aging in place across the world. In age-friendly communities, the policies, services, and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to help seniors live safely, enjoy good health, and stay involved in community life. Age Friendly Community Funding will be available for communities to engage residents to plan what is most needed to support aging in place in their community and to initiate projects, programs, and services.

ECE is undertaking a full review of the Income Assistance (IA) program to ensure its objectives, benefits and delivery support the social and economic aspiration of the people of the NWT. In support of the Mandate of the 19th Legislative Assembly to take action to enable seniors to age in place with dignity, ECE will create a separate IA program tailored to seniors and persons with disabilities. Both programs are expected to go live in 2023-2024 fiscal year.

Government Renewal Initiative: Government Renewal Initiative (GRI) is an initiative which will provide evidence-based information to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of individual programs and services across all departments. GRI uses program evaluation, program reviews, and priority-alignment assessments to build objective, reliable evidence about program performance and may provide evidence that could support the reallocation of resources in program areas based on program performance.

Increase Resident Health Care Professional and Other Professionals: The Health Recruitment Unit (HRU) is focused on championing living and working healthcare in the North as a recruitment tool. Various employment programs are communicated to applicants as a way to establish the GNWT, Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority (NTHSSA) and Tłıchǵ Community Services Agency (TCSA) as an employer of choice in the minds of job seekers.

HRU works closely with Health and Social Services, NTHSSA and TSCA to form Joint Working Groups that identify gaps and develop strategies for meaningful recruitment and retention. HRU is also working closely with Aurora College and nursing students to provide dedicated supports for hiring new graduates directly into the NTHSSA and TSCA in indeterminate positions.

NTHSSA has developed an Action Plan to address concerns expressed by staff in exit interviews with the Action Plan recently released to the public in November 2021. Results of the NWT Nurse Recruitment and Retention Survey 2021 and What We Heard Report 2021 were shared with Finance June 2022 and a working group was formed to review the results and provide recommendations to the Joint Territorial Nursing Committee. These initiatives come up against the challenge of recruiting and retaining these professionals during a time when there is a critical shortage of health and social services professionals across Canada, with increasing competition for skilled labour in these areas.

Increase the number and variety of culturally respectful, community-based mental health and addictions programs: Part of increasing population growth is retaining residents who already call the NWT home. Having access in the NWT to adequate and appropriate mental health and addictions programs, residents can receive treatment without leaving the NWT. With regard to mental wellness and addictions recovery, there are currently three major mandated initiatives in development: Managed Alcohol Program, Transitional Housing for Addictions Recovery, and Medical Detox.

The establishment of a Managed Alcohol Program aligns with the priorities of the 19th Legislative Assembly to increase the number and variety of culturally respectful, community-based mental wellness and addictions recovery supports in the NWT. Managed Alcohol Programs support a harm reduction approach that focuses on managing alcohol consumption to reduce harm for people with severe alcohol dependence and chronic homelessness. Managed Alcohol programs work to preserve the dignity of the person and increase access to primary health care, social and cultural programming.

Medical Detox is available on a case-by-case basis in the NWT. There is no formal program or established model for how this is offered within the health care system, a gap in current service options. Medical Detox needs vary for each individual and for a small number of people, choosing to detox at home can be fatal. A Territorial Medical Detox Program will connect people to safe, effective, and personalized treatment. The Department and the Authorities are committed to developing a clear model for the provision of Medical Detox which will include both inpatient and community components. Work is underway to establish a process for primary care providers to access medical detox through direct admission. Data collection is in process and policies are pending approval. Significant capacity challenges have resulted in project delays.

The Mandate of the 19th Legislative Assembly identifies the need to strengthen addictions aftercare programming. The availability of safe, sober housing close to home is a key component of supporting individuals in their recovery. Sober living helps people returning from addictions treatment build on skills and habits learned while in treatment. It also helps them to develop sober social relationships in the NWT, which can assist in their recovery. The Department of Health and Social Services is taking active steps to establish community-based, culturally relevant transitional housing options in the NWT. As a result of an Expression of Interest issued in December 2021, the Department is currently in the process of working with four different communities from across the NWT on the development of transitional housing service delivery models.

The Mental Wellness and Addiction Recovery Division manage four Community Support Funds to help organizations design and deliver programming that is tailored to the unique needs of their residents and communities:

- On-the-Land Healing Fund
- Addictions Recovery Peer Support Fund
- Addictions Recovery & Aftercare Fund
- Community Suicide Prevention Fund

A number of Mental Health options have been implemented to provide additional and complimentary supports for residents of the NWT. The above is in addition to other core services such as Facility-Based Addictions Treatment, Community Counselling Program, Psychiatric Care, NWT Help Line, etc.

Other Government Initiatives

Across the GNWT, departments have policies, programs and services in place which can help to stimulate population growth and support current residents staying in the NWT.

Recruitment and Retention of Employees: One of the priorities identified in *Growing the NWT* was “Improving actions to both recruit and retain employees in the GNWT workforce.” As the largest employer in the NWT, the GNWT plays role in attracting new residents as well as modeling and testing recruitment and retention strategies for other employers to learn from. To achieve the goal of a representative workforce and ensure that potential and current employees have the skills and abilities to meet labour needs, the Department of Finance has developed and implemented several programs intended to support the recruitment and retention of employees, including programs that focus exclusively on the recruitment and development of Indigenous employees.

Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Framework and Action Plan: The Framework and Action Plan will review current programs, tools, and resources, provide opportunities for innovation, and identify and address barriers within internal resource policies, systems, and procedures.

Summer Student Employment Program: Support northern post-secondary students in their pursuit of a higher education by offering a summer work opportunity between April 15 and August 15.

Internship Program: Departments recruit post-secondary Northern graduates into positions of one (1) or more years in length.

Indigenous Career Gateway Program: Improve access to employment opportunities for external Indigenous candidates for entry level employment and trainee opportunities with the GNWT.

Regional Recruitment Program: Link vacant regional positions with potential employees with on-the-job training for program participants through a structured and managed approach.

Indigenous Management and Development Training Program: Support the development of Indigenous employees by providing the necessary skills training and/or work experience for career advancement.

Building Capacity in Indigenous Governments Program: Support secondment arrangements with Indigenous governments in all regions to help develop their human resource capacity.

Affirmative Action Policy: The GNWT's Affirmative Action Policy outlines the strategies and measures directed towards achieving equality in employment and career development of qualified, suitable, and eligible target group persons, including persons with disabilities

A Strategic Diversity and Inclusion Framework: To drive diversity and inclusion throughout the GNWT, a Framework is currently being developed. A draft of the Framework has been completed and will be subsequently reviewed. Following this, the Department will begin to work on the implementation process by integrating the Framework's goals into business practices including recruitment and retention strategies, and through an implementation plan that will support business units in recognizing and incorporating diversity and inclusion perspectives in policies, programs, and services.

Remote Work Policy and Guidelines: Allows GNWT employees to request individualized work arrangements outside of their designated worksite. Formal Remote Work arrangements are available to employees in situations where the position, employee, and remote work location are appropriate for such an arrangement. This can help to keep people in the North who might require a temporary work away from their designated worksite. Remote work arrangements where employees are able to reside in an NWT community while being employed in a position based in Yellowknife or a regional centre has the potential of advancing Indigenous representation in the GNWT and to support communities.

Education Leave: Granted by the GNWT with the objective of obtaining qualifications that is generally relevant to present or future requirements of the Territorial Public Service. Education Leave promotes growing employees from within when qualified persons cannot be recruited to carry out essential work and enables employees to keep abreast of new knowledge and techniques in their field of work.

Integrated Service Delivery Initiative: The GNWT is preparing to shift the way it provides services to residents through an Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) initiative that will improve access to services, outcomes for residents, and the experiences of service users in the NWT. ISD aims to break down the traditional siloed approach to service delivery that has so often created barriers for residents, especially those requiring multiple services across various departments. This initiative will enable programs and services to work better together so that residents receive the care and support they need, when they need it, and in ways that are culturally safe, person-centred, and accessible.

In 2020, all seven members of the GNWT Child and Families Deputy Minister Committee signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) formalizing their commitment to support the planning, development, and implementation of an ISD initiative. The MOU acknowledges the need for strategic, systemic, and structural change across government Departments and systems, recognizing that integration efforts over the last 20 years have not been with a whole of government approach, resulting in their limited success.

An ISD Conceptual Framework, vision document and workplan have been drafted. The documents will be used as the foundation to guide and align the GNWT commitment to this initiative and to support the GNWT in moving forward on actions to improve service experiences at the community level. With the integration expertise of the Health Standards Organization (HSO), the ISD initiative went through an integration assessment to determine the GNWTs readiness for integration. The process assessed the GNWTs current integration status against 10 internationally recognized standards for integration. A learning report and addendum specific to the GNWT context was created that outlines recommendations and next steps for moving integration forward. In March 2021, the Integrated Case Management Program became the first ISD demonstration site. The demonstration site will test new ways of working together, sharing information, reducing barriers, and streamlining services through an adapted wraparound service provision model.

References

Growing the NWT: Supporting Population Growth of the Northwest Territories, Tabled Document 258-17(5) Tabled on June 3, 2015.