



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Motion 34-20(1):
Supporting RCMP Response to Mental Health**

Motion

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Range Lake, that the Government of the Northwest Territories work in collaboration with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to implement a crisis intervention team, through a partnership that supports the response to mental health emergencies, at an appropriately staffed level in order to maintain 24/7 support;

AND FURTHER, the purpose of the crisis intervention workers is to enhance the response and reduce police contact in mental health-related emergencies and allow the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to focus their efforts on disrupting the drug trade in the Northwest Territories;

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

GNWT Response

The GNWT is committed to addressing public safety concerns and advancing work to support safer residents and communities. The GNWT agrees that social responses to addictions, mental health and homelessness are needed to reduce the unnecessary overuse of policing services and criminal justice systems. The 20th Assembly Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health and Social Services have been mandated to develop options for integrating health and social services professionals in frontline policing responses for individuals in crisis.

The Department of Justice is undertaking a review of the types of supports that other jurisdictions employ to complement or reduce reliance on police in response to persons experiencing crisis. Models currently being used in other jurisdictions to address this area are under consideration, including the Yukon's Mobile Crisis Response Team. The Mobile Crisis Response Team is a partnership between the Government of Yukon and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) "M" Division and pairs police officers with mental health nurses to offer immediate, specialised care to those in distress when responding to calls for service related to mental health and suicide risks. A mobile health team initiative currently led by Alberta Health Services in Grande Prairie Alberta is also under review.

Next steps will involve further discussions with RCMP "G" Division and the Department of Health and Social Services to explore what options might be possible in the NWT. These discussions will give consideration to the proposed 24/7 crisis intervention team contemplated in Motion 34-20(1) but will also need to consider the reality of current challenges in staffing existing mental health support related

positions in the NWT, and the costs associated with such a substantial initiative. While this work is underway and will take time to determine feasibility, the GNWT has existing resources that are supportive in addressing mental health awareness and individual needs.

The Health and Social Services system has several programs available to support the mental health and substance use needs of persons throughout the NWT. The Community Counselling Program is available in all communities and provides flexible walk in, same day services and delivers community-based outreach mental health services where possible. The *Mental Health Act* allows for Assisted Community Treatment Plans for clients with the diagnosis of a serious mental health disorder who meet specific criteria. These plans are developed in collaboration with the client and health care team and are intended to provide clients with necessary supports that are available in the community, such as community mental health nursing, case management and psychiatric assessment.

The Department of Health and Social Services is also working to establish a substance use health program, which will include the development of a program model for medical detox in both acute care and community-based settings. The program will provide specialized substance use positions and improved education for frontline health care staff.

The Department of Justice is committed to providing support to communities to develop and implement sustainable local justice programming in the areas of restorative justice, victim services, community policing, and crime prevention. Through the Men's Healing Fund, the Department of Justice is supporting the delivery of community-led approaches to men's healing programming as a preventative approach to address family, intimate partner, and gender-based violence in communities across the NWT. The NWT Victim Services Program is a community-led person-centered service based on client needs. The program connects victims of crime, survivors, and their families to support and services when they need them most.

The Community Safety Officer Pilot Program in Fort Liard explores alternative approaches to community safety outside of police enforcement. The program is designed to provide a proactive, sustainable, trauma-informed, holistic approach to community safety, and to bridge the gap between community safety needs and the role of the RCMP. The program is intended to address social disorder incidents normally dealt with by the RCMP and to support the development of community-based partnerships that enhance community wellness and safety. The pilot agreement has been extended to March 31, 2026, and a program evaluation will occur at the end of the agreement term. The launch of the program was delayed due to the pandemic and sufficient data will not be available until 2026 to conduct a rigorous evaluation.

RCMP are often the first called to the scene when an individual is experiencing a mental health crisis and will conduct a risk assessment to determine whether it is safe for other professionals to offer support. RCMP officers receive regular mandatory training in crisis intervention and de-escalation, suicide intervention, suicide prevention, and in the Incident Management Intervention Model (IMIM), certification in which must be renewed for all regular officers every year. IMIM training helps officers continually assess risk based on the totality of the situation and considering behaviours, situational factors, tactical considerations, and the officer's perceptions.

The relationship between the law and people living with addictions and mental health challenges is complex. Public safety of residents is of utmost importance and the GNWT has made new investments to support the RCMP's development of a Territorial Crime Reduction Unit (CRU). The CRU will serve the entire territory with specialized resources to support investigations and proactive enforcement aimed at disrupting illicit drug supply and enhancing enforcement targeting criminal networks. Increased investment has also been made for the provision of a territorial wide RCMP Emergency Response Team, comprising officers with advanced training and equipment, who will assist in the successful resolution of dangerous situations.

The GNWT is also undertaking a whole of government approach to service integration, with an initial focus on homelessness and the associated factors contributing to homelessness. This Integrated Service Delivery initiative aims to bring together various GNWT and non-governmental service providers through wraparound supports focused on individuals who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. This support will ensure service providers meet individuals where they are at, and that services are equitable, timely and agile. The initiative will also identify the barriers to service access that address the root causes of crime, as the connection between societal factors, such as housing instability, and crime are well documented. Currently, in Yellowknife, the Department of Health and Social Services has two Street Outreach Community Health Nurse positions that deliver a variety of health services to clients experiencing homelessness and those who are actively using substances, including wound care, chronic disease management, primary care and referrals to specialized services. These services are delivered in homeless shelters and community settings.