

**GNWT Response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations  
Report on the Review of the 2007-2008 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner**

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**GNWT Response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations' Report  
4-16(4) on the  
Review of the 2007-2008 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner**

**Committee Recommendation 1:**

**The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT make planning for and implementation of the training and certification of interpreters and translators a priority, and further that the Government report back on the status of this initiative.**

**GNWT Response:**

**Training for Interpreter and Translators**

The Yamozha Kue Society in partnership with the Akaitcho Territory Government developed and delivered a series of six basic I/T training modules supplemented by a practicum. The focus of this training was to introduce participants to professional applications of interpretation and translation. The main purpose of the I/T training is to improve the quality of Aboriginal I/T services and access to such services in NWT communities.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) provided funding to initiate this project. The funding for the project was intended to develop new modules that could be used for each of the Aboriginal languages. All modules were attended by Elders and participants fluent in the Chipewyan language and came from the communities of Deninu Kue, Fort Smith, Lutsel K'e and Dettah/Ndilo. The project was successfully completed in March 2009.

In August 2009 further funding was provided to Yamozha Kue Society to complete the development and production of the training manual for the Community-based Interpreter/Translator training modules that were delivered as a pilot project in the Akaitcho region. Once completed, the training modules will be made available to all language communities as a resource guide to train local interpreter/translators.

The Government of the Northwest Territories will be working with the Aboriginal languages communities to develop a new Aboriginal languages strategy including plans for each Aboriginal language community that address the needs, circumstances and priorities of each language community. It is anticipated that the matter of Interpreter/Translator training and certification will be a key topic of discussion during the upcoming Aboriginal Language Symposium and ensuing discussion on language plans.

**Certification of Interpreter and Translators**

The Occupational Standards for Aboriginal Interpreter/Translators were developed in February 1999 and Certification Process in September 2000. Because these

documents are now outdated, a review was required prior to being submitted to the Apprenticeship Board for approval.

Representatives of the Aboriginal language communities met twice in 2006 to review and update the occupational standards for Aboriginal I/Ts. The occupational standards were validated and copies circulated to participants for further comments. Another meeting was scheduled in March 2008 to develop an evaluation process and select testing materials to be used in a proposed pilot certification.

A review of the required resources and expertise for the certification process indicated an apparent lack of qualified Aboriginal evaluators among some Aboriginal language communities. Elders and others fluent in an Aboriginal language can verify the speaking proficiency of a candidate in an interpretation setting. However, there is a lack of qualified evaluators to verify the writing skills of a candidate. The project was put on hold with cancellation of the certification contract by mutual agreement of all parties.

The certification process will continue in the future when there are qualified Aboriginal I/Ts who have completed regional I/T training program and can actively participate in and contribute to the Aboriginal I/T certification process.

**Committee Recommendation 2:**

**The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the GNWT establish a registry of interpreters and translators for every official language.**

**GNWT Response:**

ECE maintains a listing of available Aboriginal Interpreter/Translators, which is updated on an annual basis. This list is made available to other departments, boards and agencies upon request. The Department is not in a position to fully assess the level of skills of individual Interpreter/Translator, but staff can provide advice based on comments received with respect to services provided by the Interpreters/Translators. In the future the list will be posted on the new ECE website once completed.

**Committee Recommendation 3:**

**The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the GNWT conduct a review of its website policies and report back on whether the website policy is in compliance with Official Languages policies, guidelines and legislation.**

**GNWT Response:**

Responsibility for communications management and the provision of information to the public is largely delegated to Ministers and individual departments under *Communications Policy #11.21*. Individual departments are generally responsible for planning and conducting communications activities in support of the development, management and delivery of departmental programs and services. Departments are responsible for complying with relevant legislation and policies in carrying out their

communications activities, including the *Official Languages Act*, *Official Languages Policy #71.10* and *Communications Policy #11.21*.

*Communications Policy #11.21* sets out the general framework and principles for GNWT communications. The Policy does not establish specific requirements on communications in the official languages of the Northwest Territories, but does affirm that the status of languages under the *Official Languages Act* should be respected and upheld in all government communications.

The *Official Languages Policy #71.10* provides that members of the public may have reasonable access to GNWT programs and services in the official languages. The Policy also provides that the Executive Council may approve Official Languages Guidelines establishing specific responsibilities with respect to the use of official languages in the delivery of government programs and services.

The Executive Council approved *Official Languages Guidelines* applicable to all GNWT departments and specified boards and agencies in 1997. Guideline #6 establishes specific requirements for the translation of public information material used in the delivery of programs and services or in public consultation. Under the Guideline, public information material shall be translated into the official languages when:

- The material has been requested on an on-going and frequent basis by members of the public speaking an official language other than English; or
- The substance of the material is of significant importance to the health or safety of members of the public.

Public information material is defined in Guideline #6 as material “*designed to inform or educate the public about various programs and services.*” While the Guideline does not explicitly refer to public information communicated over the Internet, this definition is consistent with the type of information made available to the public on GNWT websites. In general, where departments are publishing print materials in official languages consistent with Guidelines #6, these materials are also posted to departmental websites. There have been few formal requests for the translation of specific web-only materials into Aboriginal languages.

#### **Committee Recommendation 4:**

**The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT provide a formal response to ‘Speaking of Health: Official Languages as part of Quality Health Care in the Northwest Territories’ within 120m days..**

#### **GNWT Response:**

The following response was prepared by the Department of Health & Social Services:

1. *That interpretation services in all official languages of the Northwest Territories be available throughout the health care system in the Northwest Territories.*

Upon request, interpretation services are provided by the health and social services system. For example, the Department of Health and Social Services provides a range of services to the public such as marriage and other certificates as well as health care cards.

Services to the public are also offered in official languages by the Health and Social Services Authorities.

Except for Stanton Territorial Health Authority (STHA), interpretation services are offered for French, and the aboriginal language(s) of the region. These services are offered using either interpreter, or at times using a phone service called CanTalk. STHA offers services in all eleven NWT official languages, as well as a number of other languages.

The existing Guidelines of the *Official Languages Act* recognize three levels of service:

- a. Direct Service: A bilingual employee provides a service in the official language preferred by the client (e.g. Community Health Representative in Resolution speaking Chipewyan)
- b. Facilitation Service: An employee assists to provide the service in another official language (e.g. a French speaking clerk helps admitting a client at Public Health)
- c. Interpretation Service: A trained interpreter assists an English speaking provider in the delivery of a service.

*2. That the Government of the Northwest Territories take all necessary steps to ensure the timely translation of health material in all official languages. This may necessitate the need for in-house Aboriginal language translation services or dedicated contractors for those services.*

The Department recognizes that timely translation of public material could be improved. The timely translation of documents has remained a challenge largely because of the scarcity of aboriginal languages interpreter /translators (I/Ts). Contracted services or in house would not address this challenge. The Department has at time use the services of Community Health Representatives when I/Ts are unavailable.

Furthermore, the lack of standardized terminology in many official aboriginal languages continues to cause translation difficulties as many translations are completed in a dialect that may not be suitable to some aboriginal language speakers.

The Department of Health and Social Services looks forward to continuing to work with the Department of Education Culture and Employment on I/Ts availability and standardization issues. Translation into French has been significantly easier because of the cohort of professionally trained translators on staff at the Department of ECE.

*3. That the Government of the Northwest Territories take steps to ensure that health information is available in all 11 official languages, both online and in hard copy, and throughout the Government of the Northwest Territories. These materials should include:*

- a. general contact information for resources;*
- b. general health information; and*
- c. extensive information to assist individuals in achieving a healthy lifestyle.*

The Department is currently posting e-versions to its public site, and printing hard copies based on need and requests. While our multilingual site contains basic information in all eleven official languages, the site contains a range of material in the Official Aboriginal Languages and in French. Increasingly, the Department is using audio podcasts in addition to printed materials. There are various criteria for determining which documents to translate into which aboriginal official languages. For example material on the STI has been translated in most NWT official languages while an annual report on the HSS system will be translated into French unless specific demand criteria are met.

*4. That the Department of Health and Social Services conduct a survey to determine client satisfaction with languages services when using Telecare-NWT.*

The Department undertakes regular evaluation of NWT Healthline (formerly Telecare-NWT). The evaluation tracks calls by language of service, and quality of service received. Eighty two percent of clients were very satisfied and ten percent were satisfied with the quality of service received. One percent of clients identified as French speaking.

*5. That the Government of the Northwest Territories create a directory that highlights the language proficiencies of health care professionals in the Northwest Territories.*

The Department recognizes that the development of a directory would be a valuable tool; consideration is being given on how such a directory would be developed and maintained.

Currently, if a member of the public asks for health or social services in an Official Language, other than English, the service is provided according to accepted standards of practice. Specifically, service is provided in accordance with existing Guidelines of the *Official Languages Act*: direct, facilitated, or interpreted service.

*6. That the Government of the Northwest Territories immediately implement a plan for the training and certification of interpreters/translators, with special training being available in medical terminology.*

The development of a system-wide plan to implement the recommendation is complicated by factors including the issue of standardized terminology in the aboriginal languages. The Department would support collaborating with the Department of Education Culture and Employment in the advancement of training and certification of I/T.

*7. That the Government of the Northwest Territories take immediate steps to develop a medical terminology dictionary in all Aboriginal official languages.*

STHA currently has "A Handbook for Medical Interpreters in Inuktitut, Tlicho, French and North Slavey. There are 6 other official languages awaiting production. Based on volume of requests for interpretation, the new translations of this resource are being completed in the following order: South Slavey, Inuinnaqtun, Chipewyan, Inuvialuktun, Cree, and Gwich'in. The Department will continue to work with language groups who receive funding for language development if they identify this as a priority for their funding.

*8. That a formal process be developed wherein each official language group in a designated area will have direct input to the regional administration of the health authority of that region.*

Representation on Health and Social Services Authorities' Boards of Management is inclusive. The Minister is required by legislation to ensure that the Board Members appointed will adequately represent the communities the Authority serves. Members may represent individual communities or specific stakeholders such as Aboriginal or municipal organizations.

In order to ensure adequate representation, the Minister seeks nominations from the Band Councils, municipal governments, Métis and Aboriginal organizations and from the general public to ensure that residents' health and social services needs are met and that their cultural and language requirements are respected.

*9. That health care practitioners who come to the Northwest Territories be provided with a basic orientation on cultural and language considerations in the Northwest Territories.*

The Department recognizes the importance of culturally appropriate services as such the "Different Way of Living" DVD is offered as a resource for new staff. This is in addition to the orientation resources available on the recruitment and retention website [www.practicenorth.ca](http://www.practicenorth.ca).

*10. That the Government of the Northwest Territories continue to work towards an Integrated Service Delivery Model for health care throughout the Northwest Territories*

*and that interpreters/translators who speak the official languages of a designated area be employed by health authorities in that area as part of that Integrated Service Delivery Model.*

The Department recognizes the importance of having services and programs being offered in the appropriate language and respecting cultural values. Currently a number of HSSAs already have IT on staff. The Department will continue to work with ECE to clarify certification standards, and with HSS Authorities to ensure quality interpretation services.

*11. That the Government of the Northwest Territories increase the use of Telecare, Telehealth and other technologies to provide interpretation services in all official languages in all health care settings throughout the Northwest Territories.*

Healthline (formerly Telecare) offers 24/7 access to a certified nurse in all 11 official languages. Another available technology is CanTalk, a paid dial-in interpreter service. More strategic use of CanTalk as well as the Telehealth video-conferencing system could create stronger links among NWT and southern communities for:

- patients and practitioners
- students and mentors
- bilingual staff and peers
- staff wishing to improve language skills.

*12. That the Government of the Northwest Territories establish a pilot project community health centre in Yellowknife to service the Francophone population.*

Specifics of the project would include:

- a. The Francophone community would be directly involved in the administration of the community health centre.
- b. The working language of the community health centre would be French.
- c. The facility would collaborate extensively with the Alberta Health Network so that all services could be accessed in French. This would likely involve a heavy reliance on Telehealth technology.
- d. The facility would be evaluated after a full year of operation and the review would involve input from patients who accessed the facility over the course of the year.

A consolidated primary clinic is being developed in Yellowknife. Services will continue to be available in French and other OLS of the populations served by YHSSA. There are no plans for a stand-alone French language medical clinic. The consolidation of all

bilingual staff in one clinic / two sites will increase the likelihood that a francophone resident of the YHSSA will be served in French compared to the current distribution of bilingual staff among numerous clinics. The intent is to ensure French language client can be served in the language of their choice upon request.

*13. That the Government of the Northwest Territories continue to promote and develop programs that teach Aboriginal languages and develop a strategy to create youth who are competent in an Aboriginal language.*

The Department will continue to support ECE on their efforts to promote and develop Aboriginal language speaking Youth. In the past, HSS has contributed financially to the creation of educational resources about health and social services topics in various OLS through the aboriginal terminology development fund which ends this fiscal year.

*14. That the Government of the Northwest Territories devise programs that encourage Aboriginal youth and Francophone youth to enter careers in the health professions and to return to the Northwest Territories to work.*

DHSS is working with Human Resources on recruitment of bilingual (English / French) health professionals. There is currently no targeted recruitment of official Aboriginal languages-speaking employees. The Department agrees that including information on the Practice North site about translation and interpretation professions and aboriginal language capacity should be considered for the future.

*15. That the Government of the Northwest Territories develop strong incentive programs to encourage those who speak an Aboriginal official languages or French to work in the North and to encourage their retention.*

The Department will work towards utilizing Feel Good Gazette, SharePoint, messenger other strategies to promote and encourage employees who speak more than one OL. Consideration will also be given to maintaining a list - of bilingual bonus recipients, posted as PDF on the staff SharePoint site, used by all HSSAs and DHSS

**Committee Recommendation 5:**

**The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the GNWT table a comprehensive response to this report within 120 days.**

**GNWT Response:**

As indicated by the GNWT Response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations' Review of the 2006-2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner, the Government is committed to responding to Standing Committee reports in a timely manner.