



Legislative Assembly  
Assemblée législative

**Meeting: SD 78-18-2017**

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2017  
COMMITTEE ROOM 'A'  
12:00 PM**

## AGENDA

1. Prayer
2. Review and Adoption of Agenda
3. Declarations of Conflict of Interest
4. **Public Presentation by the NWT Seniors' Society with Ms. Barbara Hood and Mr. Leon Peterson**
5. New Business
  - a)
  - b)
  - c)
6. Date and Time of Next Meeting
7. Adjournment

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**Submitted to:**  
**Members of the Social Development Committee**  
**Government of the Northwest Territories**

**Advancing Inclusion and Combating Ageism by Establishing A**  
**NWT Seniors Strategy**  
**To Provide a Better Quality of Life for Older Adults in the NWT**

**Presented by Leon Peterson, Past-President**  
**& Barb Hood, Executive Director**

**NWT Seniors' Society**  
**November 17, 2017**



Good Afternoon:

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you and encourage you and all Members of the Legislative Assembly to prepare for an NWT Seniors' Strategy, which would align our territory with world-wide and Canada-wide efforts in this area.

## **Background:**

NWT Seniors' Society is the only territorial organization who works exclusively on behalf of older adults over 50 years of age in the NWT. The organization will celebrate 35 years in the NWT in 2018. The Board of Directors represents elders and seniors groups in communities with two representatives from each of the 9 regions, a total of 18 individuals. All Board Members are over 60 years of age and the membership is 75% First Nations in origin, the remainder of the membership on the Board of Directors is of Non-Aboriginal decent.

The NWT Seniors' Society new strategic plan, 2017-2020 was approved by the membership in October, 2017. There are four priorities for our work for the next three years:

1. **Safety and Security**
2. **Income Security**
3. **Housing**
4. **Interagency/Team Work**

The NWT has many "successful agers" and in our *Quality of Life* research where we partnered with Aurora Research Institute during our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, we found most older adults feel they have a good quality of life. Our shared goal when working with older adults is to increase the quality of life through the lifespan in conjunction with government and other organizations and older adults working to promote active healthy aging of both individuals, organizations and systems. We aspire to have a way of life in which physical, social, mental, emotional and spiritual activities are valued and integrated into the daily lives of all NWT residents. When each of these components is maximized, successful aging is achieved.

## World/Canada-Wide Priority to Develop Seniors Strategies:

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently released their inaugural “*World Report on Ageing and Health*”. The WHO is engaged in a process to mobilize member states, including Canada, to agree to five priority areas for action by 2020 which includes:

1. Fostering healthy ageing in every country
2. Aligning health systems to the needs of older populations
3. Developing long-term care systems
4. Creating age-friendly environments
5. Improving, measuring, monitoring and understanding.

In Canada on a national level, the *National Seniors Strategy, Second Edition, January, 2016* is entitled “*An Evidence-Informed National Seniors Strategy for Canada*”. This document is produced by an “Alliance for a National Seniors Strategy” and was funded by the Canadian Institute of Health Research. The report sets the agenda for the inaugural activities of the National Institute on Ageing (NIA) established at Ryerson University.

The alliance of organizations that produced the National Seniors Strategy included Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Nurses Association, Canadian Home Care Association, Canadian Caregiver Coalition, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, CGS (Canadian Gerontology Society) and National Institute on Aging.

The National Seniors Strategy says “We have reached an interesting time in our history with 2015 marking the first year Canadian aged 65 and over outnumber those who are younger than 15 years of age. Older Canadians now represent the fastest growing segment of the population – there numbers will double over the next two decades and by 2035, one in four Canadians will be older than 65 years of age. This unprecedented demographic shift will clearly present us with both challenges and opportunities but our national coming of age should be seen as a triumph rather than a pending disaster.”<sup>i</sup>



Canada's National Seniors Strategy has five fundamental principles underlying the national strategy with four pillars supporting the strategy. The five fundamental principles are:

access, equity, choice, value, and quality

The four pillars supporting the strategy are

independent, productive and engaging citizens;  
healthy and active lives;  
care closer to home, and  
support for caregivers.

In just this last week, the Ontario Liberal Government launched their new seniors strategy - *Aging with Confidence: Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors*. We have not had an opportunity to review that work, but look forward to other provinces following their example.

The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) is an organisation that believes in a world where the health, rights, and choices of older people are protected and respected, and they recognized the new Ontario seniors' strategy has taken an important step towards recognizing these rights and choices.

## **What's Been Happening in the NWT?**

In December, 2016, during a quarterly meeting with the Minister Responsible for Seniors, Minister for Education, Culture and Employment and a short visit with the Premier, we introduced the topic about the development of an NWT Seniors' Strategy. We were following up with the Premier who had identified during the election campaign that he would like to see an NWT Seniors' Strategy. Premier MacLeod identified, however, that this was not part of the current priorities or work within this Legislative Assembly term. We recognize this may be a new initiative and will take much more discussion but NWT Seniors' Society is aligned and in agreement with the WHO, the IFA and the Canadian National Seniors Strategy.

According to GNWT Bureau of Statistics 2016 estimates, the NWT has 11,700 residents 50 or more years of age of which 8,550 are 50-64 and 3,150 are 65 or more years of age. This means that older adults make up 26% of the total NWT population. Older adults are the fastest growing demographic in the territory, with the population 60 or more years of age expected to double in the next 20 years. As they say, statistics don't lie – and these statistics provide we are experiencing a powerful shift in the power of older adults in our territory.

The NWT may not have the same statistical evidence that our 65 and older population are outnumbering those in the 15 years and younger years of age, but this population growth was projected as early as the *Seniors' Action Plan in 2002-03*. Meeting the growing and evolving needs of NWT's ageing population requires effort on all levels of government and recognized worldwide as a priority. This shift was predicted even before 2002 and we have been rather slow in making the shift in our programs and services.

The priority areas in the WHO document and the National Seniors Strategy for Canada resonates within organizations and with older adults in the NWT. Our strategic plan is also in line with the priorities and overarching strategies that were identified.

We have experience here in the various GNWT departments with developing long-term care strategies, an Anti-Poverty Strategy, Aging in Place strategies, Mental Health & Addictions Strategy, and healthy active aging and creating age-friendly environments efforts to name a few. The work has included research and best practices with departments working in silos in the development of most of these strategies. We recognize and applaud Minister Abernethy's department for their work and we hear that the work does involve collaboration among GNWT department and is parallel to a NWT Seniors Strategy therefore we do not need an NWT Seniors' Strategy. Our response has been that "aging" should not be seen as a health issue or a social services issue, this is an issue to be coordinated across all government departments as we cannot and should not be viewed or stigmatized as being best served with the DH&SS being the len on behalf of older adults.

The Government of the NWT can play a key role in being a standard setter, a catalyst and a funder of important social change in priority areas which could be developed in conjunction with all levels of government. Those priority areas should include guaranteed income for all, affordable, adequate and abundant housing and health care, interagency and partnership building, safety for all our residents in our communities and combating ageism in the policies and programs that are developed. We need to ensure there is a more comprehensive system that brings a focused lens on all programs within GNWT and brings a central vision to enable clear decision-making and direction to programs that affect the quality of life for all older adults.

While the past and current governmental departments have done a tremendous amount of work, there is a severe lack of coordination, a huge web of programs that runs like a patch work quilt making navigating the system very onerous for older adults in particular. Throughout these programs and the system, there are huge ageist attitudes from the political, bureaucratic and front line service delivery levels.

We mentioned earlier that the International Federation of Aging (IFA) recognized the WHO and recently the Ontario Seniors Strategy. The IFA's hope is that addressing ageism and ageist attitudes will be an integral part of all seniors' strategy. One of the four conference themes at the IFA Global Conference on Ageing in Toronto in summer,

2018 is *Combating Ageism*. This is an important barrier to older adults feeling they are respected and valued in our society, worldwide and here in the NWT.

## **Next Steps in Developing a Seniors Strategy for the NWT**

The first steps in developing a seniors' strategy for the NWT should begin with partnership building and a public consultation to determine the best way forward. Partnerships should include all community-based governments, educational institutions and programs, all aboriginal groups, self-governments, elders committees and seniors societies in the NWT. The NWT Seniors' Society is well placed to continue to build on lessons learned from our work with Aurora Research Institute, Dene Nation, Gwich'in Tribal Council, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and all other self-governments, Elders Committees and Seniors Societies in the NWT. '

The second step would be to study and conduct research which provides evidence-based strategies and approaches in practices employed towards meeting the needs of an ageing population. This is required to inform the formulation of our priorities and developing policies that are free of ageist attitudes. This would include a world-view jurisdictional scan, as well as an analysis of research and practice from Canada and beyond, involving First Nations communities, where there has been demonstrated leadership in the priority areas which are identified in the powerful partnership that can be formed in the NWT.

We can take all the work being done in a fragmented way across the departments and government corporations and agencies, like the NWT Housing Corporation, and bring it under one wing. We can influence change, recognizing significant work will need to be done, but that it must be done to continue to increase the quality of life of older adults.

Ultimately, we look to you and all Members of the Legislation to ensure this is a priority for you going forward. This cannot be tackled by individual government departments and agencies. This will require that that a central group develop priorities in the NWT that show a willingness to take an enlightened approach and demonstrated leadership in collaboration with government.

A two year window exists for this government to take a leadership role in the northern territories to align with the WHO, the IFA and Canada's National Seniors Strategy and the strategies which are currently being developed in other provinces. You as our MLAs and Members of this committee are leaders and influential change shifters; we look to you and your colleagues to make this a priority in your conversations, business plans, and mandate over the next two years and beyond. NWT Seniors' Society should be at the center of this work and if the GNWT is not ready or not able at this time to begin the process, as we indicated to our Minister Responsible for Seniors a year ago, we would take this work on with help from the GNWT as our funder.

We are ready to work with you and will take your questions about how we see we could move forward.

Respectfully submitted,

Leon Peterson & Barb Hood

On behalf of the Board of Directors NWT Seniors' Society

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<sup>1</sup> National Seniors Strategy. (2016) An Evidence-Informed National Seniors Strategy for Canada, Second Edition, January 2016. pp. 4.