

THE HONOURABLE JULIE GREEN
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Use of Indigenous Languages on Official Documents

Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to Written Question asked by the Member for Kam Lake on March 9, 2022, regarding Use of Indigenous Languages on Official Documents.

1. Who sits on the Indigenous Fonts Working Group?

A Terms of Reference for an inter-departmental working group on Indigenous fonts and diacritical marks was approved in early 2020, to advance the work to support GNWT technical solutions for implementation of NWT Official Indigenous Languages on GNWT-issued identity documents. Unfortunately, due to the response to COVID-19 the working group has not met. The working group will be co-chaired the Departments of Health and Social Services and Finance, and the Office of the Chief Information Officer. Membership on the working group includes representatives from all GNWT departments. The co-chairs met in March 2022 to review the Terms of Reference, and the intent is for the working group to resume in April or May 2022.

2. What GNWT systems will be impacted?

Any information system that requires the individual's official name to be entered into the system, supported by a GNWT-issued foundational identity document, such as a Birth Certificate, will potentially be impacted. One of the deliverables of the working group is to "assess the upstream and downstream implications of changes to the collection and sharing of information using Indigenous fonts and diacritics for affected programs and services to minimize disruption and impact to clients". This will determine the scope of affected programs, services and associated GNWT systems that will be impacted.

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No./Nu. 37-19(2)

3. What are the technical needs of the Government of the Northwest Territories to see this change?

The working group's assessment of the scope of programs and services that will be impacted to minimize disruption and impacts to clients will be used to then assess technical needs. GNWT staff will review the technical requirements and financial implications of changes to the existing information systems. This will inform the next steps and timelines needed to generate NWT Vital Statistics documents with Indigenous fonts and diacritics.

4. How are other jurisdictions implementing Indigenous fonts on vital statistics documents?

At this time Indigenous fonts and diacritics have not been implemented on Vital Statistics documents in any of the provinces or territories. We continue to canvass and connect with other jurisdictions, on an ongoing basis, to be aware of any potential discussions or developments.

5. What impact will this change have on a national level?

The focus has and will continue to be on taking proactive steps to avoid unintended consequences for holders of NWT Vital Statistics documents, which are foundational identity documents. Without a coordinated approach, clients would potentially be adversely impacted when trying to access programs and services at the provincial/territorial, federal and international levels. Potential impacts may include but are not limited to: access to federal programs, such as Canada Child Benefit, Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security, Social Insurance Numbers, and Canadian Passports, accessing programs and services in other provinces and territories, transfer and receipt of electronic data with provincial and territorial partners, and impacts to services with banking and financial institutions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.