

**THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE COCHRANE
PREMIER OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**

**NO.: 121-19(2)
DATE: February 26, 2021**

**Communications and Community
Engagement COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat**

Mr. Speaker, in a crisis, consistent and timely communications are crucial. The Government of the Northwest Territories understands the critical role of communications as part of our pandemic response it helps create safer behaviors, greater community solidarity, and in the end, improved health outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, we have said right from the start of the pandemic that our priority is to protect the health and well-being of residents that is why the COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat is using every tool at their disposal to connect with residents across the Northwest Territories.

In the early days of the pandemic, we launched aggressive public outreach and advertising campaigns aimed at engaging NWT residents from our youngest to our Elders. These campaigns continue today, evolving as the pandemic changes.

Our comprehensive social media strategy allows our message to reach over 20,000 residents every week on Facebook and Twitter. Mr. Speaker, radio reaches residents in 31 of our 33 communities and is critical to respecting valued oral traditions. We are running radio ads, many translated into Indigenous languages, seven days a week.

Mr. Speaker, we have been investing in communications, but we have also relied on the northern media to share our message. Through regular media briefings, and a relationship built on timely information sharing, residents are kept informed. I want to thank the media for their efforts as you have played an important part in our success.

An important part of how our government operates is building strong partnerships with Indigenous leadership and community governments. These relationships support our ability to educate and inform residents. The Chief Public Health Officer, and the Minister of Health and Social Services and the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs and I meet regularly with Indigenous leaders and community governments to share information and ensure we are hearing their concerns and working closely with them. Meetings like this are part of our communication efforts and play a valuable role.

These partnerships allow us to understand what residents want to know so that we can better target our communications efforts and ensure Indigenous leaders and community governments can support their residents and help limit the spread of COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, last month's COVID-19 outbreak in Fort Liard reinforced its importance of partnerships and communications at work in a pandemic response.

Key information that residents needed to know was written in plain language and shared with community leadership, first responders, and health officials to ensure message consistency. A door-to-door campaign was launched and written materials in English and Dene Zhatie were left with residents. We ran radio ads and designed posters in both languages.

The GNWT partnered with CKLB Radio to run a programming, social media, and a voicemail call-in campaign called Dear Fort Liard that inspired hundreds of people across the territory to post videos and messages in support of residents.

Mr. Speaker, just as important as our communications efforts is our approach to community engagement.

In early January we changed our approach to paying for isolation centres after hearing from Members of the Legislative Assembly, Indigenous leaders, community governments,

businesses and residents that we needed to reduce these costs. In response to this feedback the Isolation Centre Policy was revised to require residents to pay for stays related to discretionary travel, which has reduced costs.

Mr. Speaker, the Secretariat recently coordinated check-in meetings with community government officials and key GNWT departments to provide information about the GNWT's pandemic response and vaccines. These discussions also include pandemic planning in each community, potential funding opportunities, and community concerns.

In response to suggestions made by community representatives at these meetings, the Secretariat has produced a comprehensive community toolkit. This toolkit contains posters and plain language fact sheets on recovering at home, safety protocols for out-of-territory essential workers, self-isolation and many other topics. This toolkit is available online and has been provided to community governments and the Northwest Territories Association of Communities.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the GNWT has been working with the NWT and Yellowknife Chambers of Commerce, and NWT Tourism to address some of the concerns of the business community. In response to suggestions raised by the Business Advisory Council, the Secretariat issued a Request for Tender for isolation centre services, which resulted in the issuance of 76 Standing Offer Agreements for these support services.

Mr. Speaker, every day we see the success of our communications and engagement work in changing behaviours. This work has normalized wearing masks and keeping a safe distance from others. People understand the importance of self-isolation and following public health orders, and vaccine uptake is high. We are travelling less and staying home more. The business community has adapted, with many offering new and innovative services.

Mr. Speaker, we are all safer as a result of our collective efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19 to protect our loved ones, and our communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.