

**PROGRESS STATEMENT ON THE HOUSING ENGAGEMENT SURVEY**

Mr. Speaker, affordable, quality housing is one of the foundations from which we build on to meet our other life's goals. As children, healthy and safe places to live allow us to learn better, to do well in school and help us to become successful as we grow into adulthood. Establishing stable, secure housing is a goal for most people; from the time they begin to contemplate leaving their own parent's home. Over the course of our lives, from young adulthood, through to becoming elderly, housing can be a concern. Many families, young and old worry about the affordability, suitability, and adequacy of their homes. The importance of having a safe home to go to is never truly understood until someone doesn't have one. There is no denying that homeless people face many challenges, but the most urgent is where will they sleep and whether it will be safe.

It is through the lens of this continuum that we must look at housing. This multifaceted perspective also informed our approach when we reached out to users of housing programs, community and political leaders, Aboriginal governments and residents of the Northwest Territories to gather their recommendations through the recently completed housing engagement survey.

I am happy to report that all communities contributed to the over 1400 responses to the survey that were received; that's approximately one out of every ten households in the Northwest Territories. Respondents were very knowledgeable and did not shy away from providing feedback on open-ended questions; there were approximately 6000 write-in answers.

In many ways, the feedback reinforced situations that we are well aware of, for instance, that Public Housing is one of the most important programs offered, but that improvements

need to be made. Communications with tenants was noted as key to improving the program, specifically in the areas of customer service and rental counselling, which includes budgeting and maintenance courses. Homelessness was identified as a main priority with many respondents citing the need for integrated supports offered in combination with housing. Housing for specific groups such as seniors, families and persons with disabilities were targeted as priorities for many communities. Respondents also noted that homeownership is a critical component and lease-to-own programs by the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation need to be considered. Similarly, in market communities, many people felt that the transitional rent supplement program needs to be redesigned to be more effective to meeting the needs of the working poor. With respect to repair programs, people indicated that access to these programs needs to be improved and that there needs to be maintenance services for private homeowners in rural and remote communities.

Mr. Speaker, survey results have been compiled in a summary document. We have been using the survey to focus our efforts in the strategic renewal of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. Specific priority actions will be developed over the next year with the express goals of addressing issues raised by residents and lowering core need.

At this time, we have been analyzing the survey results for nearly three months and I am pleased to report that we are in position to announce immediate quick wins in terms of new programming and initiatives. In the near-term, some of the specific actions that we will be bringing forward include: an Aboriginal and Local government housing innovation initiative which will enable these organizations to access support to develop and implement housing solutions of their own design; a targeted lease-to-own program designed to transition higher income and/or financially stable Public Housing tenants into homeownership realizing homeownership goals of those tenants as well as freeing up much needed Public Housing for those that need it most. We will also be looking at repurposing vacant housing for other identified needs as identified within the community survey results. A new repair and renovation program is ready for implementation for seniors to support them to age in place. Repairs and renovation under this program will

focus on energy-efficiency to improve the cost of living for senior homeowners. We will be amending policy to support students who live in Public Housing, so that their education is not impacted by housing concerns. We will also be implementing a fuel-tank replacement initiative to assist homeowners deal with a growing risk area that represents significant environmental implications. These are some of the areas that we will be implementing in the short-term. We are also developing new programming, new initiatives, policy changes, and research in the mid-term and long-term as well.

Mr. Speaker, we have an opportunity now to transform the approach to housing programs and policy for possibly the next decade, making proactive changes; and transforming the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation into a true social program that will have real, tangible and positive results for our residents I look forward to rigorous debate and examination of the proposed directions that we are contemplating.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all our Members who promoted the survey to their constituents. I want to thank Local Housing Organizations and Government Service Officers who facilitated the filling out of the surveys in small communities, providing helpful assistance and even translation when needed. Most importantly, I want to thank the over fourteen hundred respondents that took the time to seriously contemplate what is working, what is not, and what is missing and transferring their recommendations into the housing engagement survey. The participation in the survey sent a clear message that affordable, quality housing is a main priority for residents of the Northwest Territories. I look forward over the next year to working with everyone in this House to design a housing system that will be enduring, responsive, effective and appropriate for the residents of the Northwest Territories.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.