

Northwest Territories Housing Corporation Strategic Renewal

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on the progress of the Strategic Renewal that is being undertaken by the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

The Housing Engagement Survey was used to identify what is working, what needs improvement, and what is missing for housing programs. Each policy and program is currently being revised in consideration of these needs as well as ensuring that programs meet the mandate commitments, are effective in meeting their objectives, and are appropriate and efficient through considering alternative design and delivery approaches.

Action on Strategic Renewal is already underway. As one fellow Member of the Legislative Assembly has stated “we are starting to pick the low hanging fruit”.

One key issue we heard was the need to improve customer service. Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. This is especially true when providing a critical support, such as housing, often to the most vulnerable in society. In response, the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation is now providing customer service training. All program, finance, and technical staff, Senior Management and our Local Housing Organizations partners, will have access to this training on an annual basis.

Members of the Legislative Assembly identified, and the survey confirmed, financial challenges as an obstacle for homeowners and many residents. In response, we have made changes to address the cost of living.

- Households earning under \$60,000 per year will no longer be required to make a co-payment for repair programs.

- We are launching a Fuel Tank Replacement initiative. The initiative will assist homeowners to cover the cost of replacing above ground fuel tanks that do not meet current standards or are in poor condition, through a one-time forgivable loan.

- We have made policy improvements to allow family members to take over the forgivable loans of their parents or siblings who have either passed or need to move to access long-term medical care. This change will help ensure the continuity of community housing, avoid family hardship, and decrease vacant housing.
- We will be addressing affordability in market communities through two approaches. One will be expanding financial partnerships with non-government organizations to provide rental payment assistance and housing stability support within a Housing First model. We will also re-launch the rent supplement program, which will contain stronger supports and be streamlined to ensure better access.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of living is often felt hardest by our aging population. It is critical to provide support for seniors to continue living independently in their home communities. As such, seniors will now be able to access a new repair program specifically designed to extend the longevity and improve the energy efficiency of their homes. This funding can be accessed on top of our Contributing Assistance for Repairs and Enhancements program. We will also be completing a senior housing planning study over the next few months in order to define demand and urgency as well as to identify design features desired to meet senior's needs for a new home.

We also need to promote wellness and healthy choices. We want to retain our young people in our communities and build our knowledge base so we need common sense solutions to support students in public housing. Students can now go away to school for four years without having to worry that they will lose their unit or have to fulfill a residency requirement upon their return to their community.

All of these initiatives begin today, and we will continue this work in the near future.

In the coming months, a new program will be finalized which will support tenants in purchasing the homes that they live in. Creating Pathways from Public Housing to homeownership was a prominent theme from the survey. There are public housing tenants that have the capacity to own and maintain their own home, but there is no market in their

communities. This initiative will provide a homeownership option for residents who may not be able to access traditional lending sources.

We are developing online home maintenance training materials for residents and increasing the effectiveness of our website and social media presence.

We are working on a pilot project to have a Housing Support Worker engage one-on-one with tenants facing eviction, to assist them in successfully maintaining their housing.

We now have a Community Housing Support initiative that partners with local and Indigenous governments to implement innovative and community-driven housing projects, and to provide further support, we are creating individual Community Housing Plans.

Mr. Speaker, corporate change is a long and challenging process. This change began with previous governments, which set the stage for renewal by stabilizing and rationalizing the operations of the Housing Corporation through improved systems and rigorous financial accountability. Now, we must build upon that progress to become even more responsive to our residents.

We are leaving no stone unturned in our actions. A variety of options are being considered, including new programs, educational components, pilot projects, research into challenging issues, and policy improvements. We are planning focused, fiscally-responsible investments in the short-term, while striving for adequate, affordable, and suitable housing for all residents in the long-term.

Mr. Speaker, I have been driving the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation hard to make these necessary changes and I am pleased to see the progress made so far. We still have much more to do, and I am excited to lead them on that progress over the next two years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.