

**The Emergency Management Organization
and Community and Indigenous Engagement on COVID-19 Response**

Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic is a global crisis on a level the world has not seen in generations. Taking action to slow its spread and protect public health has required leadership from all levels of government.

Today I would like to highlight the work that has been done by the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs and the Emergency Management Organization in response to COVID-19.

The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, or MACA, has the mandated responsibility for public safety within the Northwest Territories. To accomplish this, MACA houses the Emergency Management Organization, which provides guidance and coordination for our Government and our partners to respond to territorial emergencies.

Each government department and external agency continues to be responsible for its own operations and decisions, but by having members of each department attend the meetings, the Emergency Management Organization provides a forum for discussing what they are doing and making sure their plans align in a coordinated manner.

The Emergency Management Organization, or EMO, is also responsible for making sure that all members have good, timely information about the full scope of the emergency response and for identifying potential gaps or the need for additional resources.

Typically, the focus for the EMO would be emergencies like floods or fires that only affect a portion of the Northwest Territories and are over relatively quickly. The COVID-19 pandemic is different in that it has affected everybody in the territory, has gone on for many months, and projected to last for some time. This has required the EMO to take on additional tasks and responsibilities that are unique to this pandemic.

Specifically the EMO has established and maintained all isolation centres in the four regional centres – Yellowknife, Inuvik, Hay River, and Fort Smith. In addition, EMO is supporting check points at airports and highways to keep track of who is entering the territory and make sure they know about our public health requirements.

The EMO also supports the 8-1-1 Support Line. Residents can dial this one easy number and select one of three options - general information on COVID-19 in the NWT, Protect NWT to raise issues of compliance for the Enforcement Task force and the third to inquire about available service and support in Communities. EMO operators answer the calls on community supports.

The EMO is also working to obtain and distribute Personal Protective Equipment for non-medical essential workers, non-government organizations, community governments and Indigenous governments. Community and Indigenous governments have supported these efforts by completing needs assessments to identify their personal protective equipment needs.

Mr. Speaker, community and Indigenous governments have also been affected by COVID-19 and have needed to adjust their operations and how they serve their residents. Since mid-March the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs has worked with Senior Administration Officers and Band Managers to identify and monitor impacts to communities as a result of COVID-19, share information, update community emergency plans and ensure continuity of emergency and essential services. These have included practical challenges such as holding council meetings remotely and making the required

changes to bylaws to do so and helping community governments understand how the Chief Public Health Officer orders affect them.

As well, I have held weekly virtual town hall meetings with community and Indigenous government leaders since the beginning of the pandemic to provide a forum to hear and answer their concerns. Other Ministers and GNWT officials have also joined me at these meetings to answer questions leaders have had about specific topics.

Our government is extremely grateful for the support municipal and indigenous governments have provided residents since the beginning of this pandemic. These governments are doing all they can to assist residents and we would not be where we are without their support.

I would also like to say thank you to all staff from the various departments who are involved with the EMO, all those who have voluntarily redeployed from other departments and agencies to support the response efforts, regional MACA staff who are continuing their direct engagement with communities, our management team who have worked non-stop since this began and, all those supporting the EMO and health efforts. Only by working together, to identify and address gaps in our plans, have we been able to keep this pandemic at bay and protect the residents of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, we have faced many emergencies in the past, but none have measured in comparison to COVID-19. This pandemic is not over, but by each of us doing our part to abide by the Chief Public Health Officer orders, and all stakeholders working together through the Emergency Management Organization, we will be better prepared as we plan for a potential second wave in the fall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.