

**Senior Citizens Month - June**

Mr. Speaker, the month of June is designated as Senior Citizens Month in the NWT. It is a time to recognize and show appreciation for the contribution made by seniors and elders to our communities, our families and society in general.

In the Northwest Territories, seniors continue to be the fastest growing demographic in our population. In fact, it is projected that seniors and elders will comprise approximately 20 per cent of our territory's population by 2035. This presents opportunities as well as challenges, Mr. Speaker.

We must ensure our seniors have a good quality of life that enables them to thrive and continue to be respected and contributing members of society.

One of the priorities of this 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly is to enable seniors to age in place with dignity. We must ensure that seniors have the necessary supports that allow them to live at home for as long as possible.

The GNWT is working across all levels of government and with community partners to ensure a wide range of social programs are available to meet the needs of seniors, including housing, financial and income supports, health care supports and accessible community infrastructure and transportation.

Mr. Speaker, one serious challenge that negatively affects many of our seniors' quality of life is elder abuse. June 15<sup>th</sup> is designated as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day to bring awareness and encourage dialogue around this important issue.

This is a topic that is uncomfortable to acknowledge or discuss, as elder abuse financial, emotional or physical can happen in a senior's own home. We must continue to address this so to ensure vulnerable seniors are protected.

The NWT Seniors' Society has worked closely with the GNWT and has been instrumental in taking the lead on elder abuse prevention initiatives by way of awareness workshops and by providing a toll-free Seniors Information Line. To complement this support, the NWT Help Line service offers confidential counselling support for residents of all ages in need of support.

Mr. Speaker, one of our first responses to the COVID-19 pandemic was to ensure the safety and well-being of our seniors, particularly those residing in long-term care facilities. We implemented a range of protective protocols and worked with families to ensure that residents could stay connected to those that love and care for them.

As the COVID pandemic response carries on, we will continue to deliver the services that seniors rely on. We are collaborating with community agencies and non-government organizations to ensure they are aware of the federal funding available to provide local support to seniors during this challenging time. We are also working with the NWT Seniors' Society to ensure communication material related to COVID-19 gets out to seniors in their Indigenous languages. This material will hopefully increase their awareness

of the situation and how they can protect themselves, as well as reduce their anxiety about contracting the coronavirus.

The Department of Health and Social Services is also currently revising and updating the Seniors Information Handbook, Mr. Speaker.

This is a valuable resource for seniors, and those who support them, that provide listings of available services from numerous helpful sources. This Handbook was developed in partnership with GNWT departments and the NWT Seniors' Society, and is updated periodically. It is available as both a hardcopy handbook and online now, and the updated version is in progress.

In closing, I want to assure our NWT seniors that the GNWT remains committed to protecting their health and safety during this uncertain time, as well as moving forward. We will continue to work cooperatively with Indigenous governments, government agencies and non-governmental organizations to achieve our goal of providing quality services for our seniors to ensure their able enjoy long and happy lives, here in the NWT.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.