

**THE HONOURABLE PAULIE CHINNA
MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES HOUSING CORPORATION**

NO.: 87-19(2)

DATE: November 2, 2020

Continued Housing and Homelessness Response to COVID-19

Mr. Speaker, supporting vulnerable residents in need of housing or facing homelessness continues to be an essential part of the Government of the Northwest Territories' response to COVID-19. The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation is working diligently to meet the needs of our residents as we move through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The need to physically distance remains with us and continues to significantly impact our interactions with each other and has highlighted the need for us all to work together, think innovatively, and simply be kind to others.

Mr. Speaker, as the pandemic unfolded last spring, the housing corporation enhanced its Transitional Rent Supplement program by streamlining the process and simplifying participant requirements. Prior to the pandemic, this program served approximately 40 participants. Now that number has expanded up to close to 150 households. This program has now been extended through November to continue to support our residents.

We recognize that the impacts of COVID-19 have been felt across our territory and country. Among the many unfortunate realities of the pandemic is that a sudden loss of income could lead some individuals to being at risk of experiencing homelessness. In light of this reality, we increased the budget for the homelessness assistance fund from \$125,000 to \$300,000. This program supports people with financial assistance to find private rental market housing. We understand that the economic uncertainty caused by COVID-19 can be extremely stressful and we are working to ensure that applications are processed as quickly as possible.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT remains committed to ensuring that our residents are able to access appropriate housing and shelter to self-isolate effectively, as needed. The GNWT has committed five million to help our most vulnerable residents be able to effectively self-isolate, this includes \$1.4 million to support the self-isolation needs of individuals at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. The funding also included \$3.6 million to bring online 108 units that were mostly in need of renovations in order to meet core housing needs.

At present, these units are not required by the Emergency Management Organization, they are in the process of being re-allocated by the Housing Corporation to rental programs, such as public housing, market rental, affordable rental, or to support homeownership. At this time, 36 of these newly renovated units have been allocated and are serving as safe, affordable, and appropriate homes for NWT residents. As more units continue to be re-allocated we expect to see a decrease in waiting lists in many communities, which should help in preparation for a second wave of COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, we must continue to work with our community partners to access buildings to serve as self-isolation centres for our most vulnerable residents, as necessary. In Yellowknife we have leased the Aspen Apartment complex from the Government of Canada in order to provide 32 units for vulnerable residents to self-isolate. Also in Yellowknife, we have supported Spruce Bough, the former Arnica Inn, which provides up to 40 supportive housing units and have assisted the Salvation Army to utilize more of its space. In Hay River, along with the Hay River committee for persons with disabilities, we opened a new emergency overnight shelter and in Inuvik we had procured Aurora College student housing over the summer months to provide temporary housing.

As the NWT begins to recover from COVID-19 the Housing Corporation will be an important economic contributor to economic recovery. We will be working with communities all across the NWT to ensure the construction, renovation, and repair work are done in a safe and considerate manner that provides the greatest benefit to the local communities and their residents.

Mr. Speaker, many residents across the NWT that are homeless or at risk of being homeless require housing stability and person-centred support. We know that addressing housing stability is critical to the success and overall well-being of our residents and is an issue that this government takes seriously. As we move into the anticipated second wave, we need to remember to look after one another, provide supports and continue to listen to the advice from our public health officials, keeping all of us safe throughout this pandemic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.