



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee  
Report Report 2-19(2): Report on the  
Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery: Recommendations to the GNWT**

Introduction

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) recognizes the difficulties that the COVID-19 pandemic and health measures being taken to combat the virus' spread is causing NWT businesses, service providers, residents, governments and non-government organizations. There is a need for planning a path forward for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The GNWT remains committed to mitigating the social, health and education impacts of this crisis on our delivery of programs as part of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The GNWT acknowledges it will play an important role in supporting the social recovery of the Northwest Territories as part of the Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery along with other key stakeholders like Indigenous governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the federal government.

A new Business Advisory Council (BAC) has been established to support the GNWT in the development and implementation of "*The Emerge Stronger Plan*" to support the economic and social recovery of the Northwest Territories.

Planning is underway for the establishment of additional Committees including the Joint Advisory Committee on Reconciliation and Indigenous Affairs, and the Special Committee on COVID 19 Economic and Social Recovery. The revised Terms of Reference for these two proposed joint MLA Cabinet committees, one related to COVID-19 response, and the other respecting efforts related to Indigenous reconciliation, were provided to the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight on August 7, 2020.

Collectively, these Committees will ensure that the experience, talent, and resources of the private sector, the Northwest Territories' Indigenous communities, Members of the Legislative Assembly and NGOs who deliver critical GNWT funded programs or services to the public are considered in the development and implementation of the economic and social recovery plan.

The GNWT would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations (Standing Committee) for the work in developing this report. The recommendations of the Standing Committee will be considered in developing a recovery plan and preparing for future phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the limited time that the GNWT has had to assess the recommendations, it is difficult to anticipate how the recommendations will inform the development of the recovery plan and therefore there will be need for further engagement with Standing Committee as the recovery plan is developed.

It should be noted that the GNWT in preparing this response to the recommendations contained in CR2-19(3) did also consider the recommendations from Standing Committee on Economic

Development and Environment (SCEDE) in CR1-19(2) and the Standing Committee on Social Development (SCOSD) in CR3-19(3).

### Background

On June 9, 2020, CR 2-19(2) was considered in the Committee of the Whole. The six recommendations were carried, including a recommendation that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a comprehensive response to the report within 120 days.

### Recommendation 1:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT undertake a review of the legislative framework supporting the GNWT's emergency response, with a view to determining what amendments are necessary to ensure that the Premier has overall administrative control whenever a public health emergency and a territorial state of emergency are declared under their respective acts at the same time. Committee further recommends that the GNWT bring forward a legislative proposal to make the necessary amendments to the GNWT's emergency response legislative framework during the life of the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly.

### *GNWT Response*

The GNWT accepts this recommendation.

The GNWT is committed to review relevant legislation to ensure that appropriate authorities are in place to deal with future pandemics to address deficiencies and barriers that prevented a holistic, coordinate response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to facilitate this review, the GNWT will undertake a "lessons learned" approach to ensure that appropriate recommendations are developed and the GNWT can benefit not only from what happened in the NWT but in other jurisdictions as well. The GNWT recognizes that we do not want to act hastily in proposing new legislation to avoid unintended outcomes, which could further complicate the ability of the GNWT to respond to a similar event.

In the interim, the Legislative Assembly enacted the *Temporary Variation of Statutory Time Periods (COVID-19 Pandemic) Act* in June 2020. This allowed the GNWT to respond in light of social distancing, closing of offices, and limited access to records, by increasing the amount of time required by legislation to perform their duties and mitigates the risk of not carrying out legislated responsibilities within the timeframes of other legislation. This is an interim measure that will be reviewed as part of the larger "lessons learned" approach.

The GNWT recognizes that there needs to be clear leadership and coordinated response from all of the departments of the GNWT in responding to both a territorial state of emergency and public health emergency. As part of the "lessons learned" approach, the GNWT will work towards an enhanced coordinated approach and response from the GNWT to a similar situation.

To address this in the interim, the GNWT has established a secretariat to coordinate the GNWT response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 2:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT develop an emergency response communications protocol that ensures regularly scheduled updates to the public, by the Premier and the appropriate emergency authorities, whenever an emergency is declared under either or both the *Public Health Act* and the *Emergency Measures Act*. This protocol should also ensure that the GNWT's public response via electronic means is supplemented by non-electronic communications mechanisms.

*GNWT Response*

The GNWT accepts this recommendation. The GNWT will continue to regularly review communications to ensure efficient, effective communications as we move to prepare for a potential resurgence of COVID-19 in a second or repeated wave.

GNWT Communications will aim to continue to regularly update the public through the Premier and the appropriate emergency authorities.

The GNWT will consider how to formalize protocol to ensure emergency communications are aimed to be regular and be delivered in multiple formats to ensure that all relevant audiences receive the information.

Recommendation 3:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT undertake steps now to address public concerns about gaps in enforcement, so that remedies are put in place before the possibility of a second wave of COVID-19 this autumn. Committee further recommends the planning necessary to ensure that an enforcement taskforce can be mobilized within 48 hours of a future declaration of emergency. The Committee also recommends that the GNWT undertake a dialogue with municipal and Indigenous governments to obtain their input on enforcement measures, and use this information to guide the development of a policy framework for the future enforcement of orders issued during a public health or territorial emergency.

*GNWT Response*

The GNWT accepts this recommendation. The GNWT acknowledges the need to review enforcement as we move to prepare for a potential resurgence of COVID-19 in a second or repeated wave. Enforcement of orders is critical to confidence in the system. Swift mobilization to support future orders will be critical and will require close collaboration between the Office of the CPHO and a range of Departments.

The GNWT also acknowledges that effective enforcement may require legislative changes from the “lessons learned” approach under recommendation 1. The GNWT has identified three areas for improvement going forward so far.

- The first is clarifying the requirements of enforcement. The GNWT has never had to enforce orders like this in the past.
- The second is the training of the enforcement officers. The need to train the enforcement officers on their authorities and responsibilities took time which slowed the enforcement activities.
- The third is public education. The focus initially, and ongoing, has been to provide education and communication to residents on compliance. The focus continues to be on promoting personal accountability for compliance, rather than relying on enforcement officers only. As outlined in recommendation 2, the GNWT acknowledges it needs to improve the communication annex of the Territorial Emergency Plan.

The GNWT will continue to engage Indigenous and community governments for input and potential partnership respecting compliance and enforcement efforts.

In the interim, the GNWT has established a task force to enforce public health orders and investigate non-compliance across all 33 communities. These officers are able to issue tickets and impose fines of up to \$10,000 on the first offence.

#### Recommendation 4:

4. The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT develop digital communications plan for the Northwest Territories, that: assesses the state of telecommunications infrastructure serving each NWT community; identifies the costs and timelines associated with ensuring that all NWT communities have access to high-speed, digital telecommunications; and identifies who will be responsible for the work and how it will be achieved. The GNWT’s long-term pandemic response must also include provisions ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to the internet during a pandemic lockdown, by developing plans, on a community-by-community basis, for ensuring internet access for individuals, when libraries and community centres are ordered closed during a lockdown.

#### *GNWT Response*

The GNWT partially accepts this recommendation. The GNWT recognizes that internet access is important but is not necessarily the only means that vulnerable populations access programs and services.

A similar recommendation was made by SCEDE in CR1-19(2) to increase internet Broadband connectivity in the NWT.

The “*Support the development of fast and reliable broadband internet services for NWT communities*” has been identified as a key action within the *2019-2023 Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories* (GNWT Mandate).

In the GNWT Mandate, the GNWT is planning to carry out the following actions to support the development of fast and reliable internet service in the NWT:

- Complete Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk fiber link;
- Work with the federal government and private organizations to secure funding; and
- Advance work to support fast and reliable broadband internet services in all NWT communities.

The GNWT will assess our ability to advance this work more quickly.

The GNWT recognizes that the importance of internet connectivity has only grown due to the increase reliance on service delivery by a digital model. The GNWT acknowledges that NWT residents, and especially vulnerable populations, may have been adversely impacted by the lack of availability of broadband Internet connectivity. The GNWT will assess the effectiveness of its service delivery model during the pandemic through both internet and traditional means.

Recommendation 5:

5. The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT prepare a “lessons learned” report, based on employee input, which can be used to inform the development of a “Working from Home Policy” designed to identify the circumstances under which employees will be authorized or directed to work from home, what supports are available to employees, and what expectations the GNWT has with respect to the accountability staff members who are working from home. The Committee further recommends that this work be completed by August 31, 2020, and shared with the Standing Committee for input, consistent with the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly’s Process Convention on the Standing Committee Review of Proposed Policy Initiatives and Implementation Plans.”

*GNWT Response*

The GNWT partially accepts this recommendation. It will be difficult to complete a “lessons learned” report with employee input within the timeline requested by the Standing Committee due to a number of factors.

The GNWT agrees that the completion of a “lessons learned” report to help inform the development of a formal “Working from Home Policy” is necessary. In developing a formal “Working from Home Policy”, it will be necessary to solicit feedback from GNWT staff, managers, supervisors and senior management. This solicitation will take time to conduct and review. In addition, it will be necessary to look at the different variables on how and when such a policy might be implemented.

The GNWT commits to completing a “lessons learned” report with input from GNWT staff, managers, supervisors and senior management in a timely manner. This “lessons learned” report will be used to inform the development of a formal “Working from Home Policy”. The GNWT will keep the Standing Committee updated on this initiative.

Recommendation 6:

The Committee recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a comprehensive response to this report within 120 days.

*GNWT Response*

The GNWT accepts this recommendation. This document, Response to Committee's Report, is duly submitted within the required timeline.