



Northwest Territories Association of Communities
**Priorities for the
2023 Territorial Election**

The Northwest Territories Association of Communities (NWTAC) has prepared this Territorial Election priorities in order to make prospective candidates aware of the issues that are important to NWT Communities.

The submission has been prepared by the NWTAC on the basis of the adopted resolutions of the organization, analysis of municipal governance issues and priorities for improvement of NWT economic and social conditions, and the priorities shared with partner organizations including the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

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The NWTAC office is open from 9 AM to Noon and 1 PM to 5 PM Monday to Friday.

Funding Gap

Communities continue to be underfunded yet are forced to take on more services, programming, and responsibility. The chronic underfunding of nearly \$40 million/year has worsened the crisis, despite a commitment by the Territorial Government to close the funding gap. The funding is 37% less than what communities need.

Every Community Government across the NWT requires funding to be able to continue providing services and programs to their residents.

During the 19th assembly, the GNWT made a commitment to lessen the funding gap; however, increases have not addressed the gap or kept pace with inflation.

All MLAs must express their views on assisting local governments and permanently resolving the budget crisis that the GNWT has a duty to resolve.

Communities face the same budget demands that face the GNWT due to forced expansion, which calls for increased financing for communities from the GNWT. While the GNWT support for Community infrastructure has

remained the same for nearly 15 years, the investment for Territorial infrastructure has almost doubled in the same period.

The GNWT must work with community governments to prevent further crises by proactively addressing the funding formulas and by also increasing the amount of funding.

For more information on the funding gap, please read the Community Matters 2019 Report. <https://nwtac.com/my-community-matters/>

For more information on how dollars are spent at a municipal level and how they have double the impact on community economies, please read a study commissioned to the Centre of the North here. <https://nwtac.com/economic-impact-community-spending/>

For Community Governments to survive and thrive, GNWT needs to:

- **Increase overall funding** provided to community governments based on demonstrated need
- **Complete and implement the updated funding formulas** based on recommendations from the MACA and NWTAC review in 2014 and the committee work in 2023
- **Commit to indexing community government funding**, like the Gas Tax funding
- **Continue to build and support community capacity** to ensure our communities are resilient, vibrant, safe and attractive places to live

Responding to Climate Change

The NWT communities' capacity to remain resilient in the face of climate change is severely constrained by the 37% budget shortfall.

NWT Communities face many challenges from climate change that necessitate focusing on resilient infrastructure, local food security, healthcare and safety, and disaster mitigation where collaboration and financial support are required to address these issues effectively. NWT Mayors are worried and with rates of change at more than 4 times the rest of Canada in the northern NWT and 2 times the rest of Canada for the south, this worry is justified.

Whether it is threats to food security or infrastructure collapse, the risk is already real in the NWT.

The NWTAC continues to work with the Territorial Government to quantify the impacts of other climate risks in the NWT.

Human health, infrastructure, economics, culture, food security, public safety, water and waste are all at risk. Life of Assets in the North are being shortened.

The cost of one risk alone: the cost of permafrost decay on public infrastructure is estimated at \$1.3 Billion. Infrastructure investments should be seen as critical to nation-building.

Collaborative efforts and financial support to communities are required to help communities overcome resource constraints and implement effective climate programs. Low water levels impact food, supplies, and reliance on diesel in NWT communities due to effects on hydroelectric dams and ice roads. Municipalities are at the frontline of disasters.



In 2023, wildfire events alone forced 12 community evacuations where more than two-thirds of NWT residents were displaced from their homes and one community was completely devastated.

In this past Legislative Assembly, unprecedented flooding and wildfire events have ravaged communities across the territory, and communities are still working to recover. The existing budget shortfall put heavy constraints on municipal infrastructure and energy, and these climate change disasters strike already overtaxed communities without relief to the point of breaking.

You will find visual minutes of our Climate Change Forum and Charrette, which illustrates the current situation. <https://climatechange.toolkitnwtac.com/>

Please read our *Climate Change Strategic Plan and Action Plan*. <https://climatechange.toolkitnwtac.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2019/06/NWTAC-Climate-Change-Strategic-Plan-June-20-2019.pdf>

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Education Reform

The education system in the Northwest Territories is failing students and desperately needs reform. Students are graduating without basic reading, writing and math skills.

The NWTAC passed a significant resolution regarding education in 2019 and 2022 with the following key points:

- Deficiencies and inadequacies exist in programs and resources in many NWT communities.
- The GNWT's commitment to enhancing public education in Education Renewal and "early childhood development."
- The pressing need for alternative education approaches and understanding challenges in traditional education.
- Proposal for Auditor General Review of education in NWT and examination of *Education Act* to ensure that all NWT post-secondary students are prepared and that students in smaller communities attain the same proficiency.
- The GNWT to sustain funding for Aurora College's Bachelor of Education and Social Work programs, focus on existing Aurora College programs and actively engage in consultations with communities and government leaders to swiftly tailor all programs to the needs of NWT students.

At the end of its last sitting, the Legislative Assembly released **Act 81**, which amends the *Education Act* including changes related to Indigenous Peoples, roles and responsibilities, parental involvement, information sharing and oversight committees. **The new Legislative Assembly must commit to follow through on these points.**

Community governments set and prioritize resolutions you will find more information on the priorities of the NWT Association of Communities in our Resolutions at <https://www.nwtac.com/resolutions/>

Housing and Homelessness

In the recent Legislative Assembly, the sole piece of legislation passed regarding Homelessness was a simple renaming of the Housing department. Meanwhile, the Northern communities of the Northwest Territories have witnessed an unprecedented surge in homelessness. This predicament is undeniably intricate, primarily stemming from the scarcity of affordable housing and a growing demand for government-provided social housing. Additionally, recent devastating fires have exacerbated the loss of homes in our Northern communities, compounding the homelessness crisis.

Key contributors to homelessness in NWT are the inability to pay for housing and addiction rates that are double the national average. As a percentage of the population, Yellowknife has the highest homeless population in Canada. Within the homeless population, 9 out of every 10 persons self-identifies as Indigenous and more than two-thirds of homeless persons in Yellowknife are from a different NWT community.

There is a heavy reliance on public housing due to high unemployment and a lack of a private housing market. The percentage of households in core need is 12% in communities with private housing markets and 42% in nonmarket communities. Housing routinely reports more than 400 applicants on waiting lists for housing units.

Well over 50% of housing is overcrowded and insufficient, impacting education outcomes, access to employment, justice, and a great many other social determinants of health.

Mental Health and Social Determinants of Health

The NWT faces severe challenges in mental health, addictions, and other social determinants of health. Limited broadband, housing problems, substantial substance abuse, and suicide rates nearly double the national average compound the issues.

Our mental well-being significantly influences our overall quality of life and our capacity to relish it. Good mental health is intricately linked to enhanced physical health, educational attainment, employment prospects, and the fostering of robust social connections.

To navigate this intricate intersection of mental health and addiction, we must give due consideration to the following:

- For the NWT to advance, reconciliation and the social determinants of health must be considered simultaneously to address housing, work, education, food security, addictions, and mental health.
- A sustained commitment to investing in home and community care, mental health, and addiction services is indispensable.
- It is imperative that all homelessness-related programs and resources operate within a cohesive framework guided by a unified strategic plan. This endeavour should encompass various government departments, such as health and social services, education, culture and employment, justice, and the territory's housing corporation.
- *The Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action #21* must be addressed where sustainable funding is provided for new and existing Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools and to ensure that funding of healing centres in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is a priority.

The NWTAC

The NWTAC is the non-profit, non-governmental organization representing the interests of all 33 NWT communities. The NWTAC presents a unified voice for communities on municipal goals and issues, based upon the membership's democratic adoption of resolutions and policy. We promote these priorities through advocacy to the territorial and federal governments and through our membership in the national Federation of Canadian Municipalities.



**For more information of the NWTAC platform for the
2023 Territorial Election please contact:**

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