

Questions and Responses for Election 2023

MLA candidates – Kate Reid

Questions were sent on behalf of the NWT Association of Communities to all Member of Legislative Assembly Candidates about issues important to communities in the Northwest Territories. We will follow up with the elected members throughout the term of the 20th Assembly.

1. NWT communities have faced a persistent funding shortfall, which became more apparent with the 2023 review. Despite commitments by the Legislative Assembly, this underfunding issue has persisted for years. Will you commit to the funding to address this persistent funding gap of nearly \$40 million/year for community governments in the NWT and provide them with the permanent resources they require?

Response: Yes, I can commit to advocating for increasing funding to community governments to continue to close the funding gap. Our community governments are the backbone of our territory and they need adequate funding to ensure crucial supports for our residents. My family is also a municipal worker family – and I believe our municipal workers need to have the resources available to make a good wage, and get good work done, especially in the aftermath of our unprecedented wildfire year.

2. What steps will you take to ensure that these communities can continue to afford to deliver these services?

Response: I will advocate for the Minister of MACA to work with all municipalities to exhaust all sources of funding, but, as you note, closing the funding gap is key.

3. The 37% budget shortfall makes climate change in the NWT even more difficult for communities to address. How will you help communities in the NWT become more resilient in the face of climate change, and what funding priorities will you establish to address these challenges, including disaster mitigation?

Response: I know the Department of Environment and Climate Change held public and stakeholder consultation about a year ago on a climate risks and opportunities assessment for the entire territory. That assessment should be completed in the 20th Assembly, to use as a blueprint with the GNWT's key partners, which include communities, to best tailor efforts to the unique needs of every community. I am keen to see MACA buttress these efforts with disaster mitigation efforts where advisable, based on the natural features of each community and what is expected from that assessment. It would be good to see measurable likelihoods of emergency scenarios, as I also hope to see the science and monitoring of climate disaster factors (floods, wildfires, permafrost slump) become more robust in the territory.

4. Are you committed to investing in municipal infrastructure and initiatives to address and prevent the effects of climate change and making it a top priority for the territorial government, particularly considering catastrophic wildfires that threaten entire communities? How will you ensure communities battling inadequate funding and legislative restrictions have the necessary resources?

Response: Yes, in my platform I specifically point to making housing more climate resilient, but of course we should consider key municipal infrastructure as well. The City of Yellowknife has asked all potential Yellowknife MLAs if they will commit to funding or advocating for funding for any community that requests updates to community wildfire protection plans – and I will. I would also be happy to review any legislative restrictions, as alluded to, to look at how the Assembly can collectively make the legislative environment more conducive to communities being able to obtain necessary resources.

5. The education system in the NWT has faced criticism for failing to provide students with fundamental abilities. The purpose of the recently passed Bill 81 is to recognize the duties of Indigenous peoples and governments, clarify responsibilities, and increase parental involvement in education. Considering these amendments, do the modifications adequately address the deficiencies in the NWT education system, or is an Auditor General Review of the education system still required?

Response: Bill 81 is one step on what the GNWT appears to believe will be a longer process to fully address the gaps identified in the 2020 Auditor General Review. I support the work to continue with the Council of Leaders, the public, and key stakeholders, and as MLA, ensuring that each concern is adequately addressed in future legislation or policy changes.

6. How do you intend to ensure educational facilities in the NWT implement the new legislative changes proposed in Bill 81 to enhance education, emphasizing addressing deficiencies and ensuring students graduate with the required skills?

Response: I think all changes to the Education Act, both completed in the 19th Assembly and any forthcoming in the 20th Assembly, will require careful scrutiny from regular MLAs to ensure legislative requirements can be 'right-sized' for each DEA and school board. What works in Yellowknife may not work in Norman Wells. Legislation should be broad, a big enough 'bucket' to ensure that all situational needs of different systems can be included, and managed through either regulation or practice. Part of my platform discusses how the GNWT is very good at telling and not listening. The role of government should be to support communities of all kinds (municipalities, NGOs, businesses, educational bodies, and so on) by paying attention to residents and being guided by their priorities, concerns and needs, and start to offer the kinds of programs and services that match those needs and priorities. If the current structure is not what NWTAC believes is adequate, I'd be happy to hear what would best serve you, and act upon that.

7. The issues of homelessness, mental health, and addiction are complex and interconnected. How do you propose to resolve the homelessness crisis in Northern communities and improve access to affordable housing?

Response: I think NGOs and grassroots solutions currently addressing these issues are showing the most promise and success stories, and point a clear path forward. The GNWT needs to focus more on supporting communities, including community organizations, and ensuring they have the tools and resources they need to continue the kinds of programs and services that address the immediate needs of residents in a practical way that is based more directly on local circumstances, needs and priorities.

Several Yellowknife NGOs are working tirelessly to reduce homelessness across several demographics. The one I am most familiar with would be the YWCA NWT's approach to ensure housing security for women and families, not only with new family housing building opening this month, but also its housing subsidy program that assists folks in paying rental arrears to ensure they are not left out in the cold. In my time with the Y, I've learned that when we include wraparound social supports in housing, folks are best placed to find their footing, and move forward out of transitional housing arrangements in their own right time, with the tools they need to do well. I am also heartened to see uptake in our smaller communities for the

Safe Homes Project that the YWCA NWT is running in Fort Good Hope, and planning with other communities, too.

In addition to recovery, I'd be remiss to not mention programs that centre land-based healing for Indigenous folks and their successes. The Aurora Village healing camp, and Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation's urban land-based healing location are both excellent examples of what is possible within and nearby to an urban setting.

For mental health, I will be immediately seeking more information as an MLA as to the capacity for more youth mental health counsellors (CYC) in schools – I recognize that we should take a region by region and community-based approach to each situation, but I am concerned that youth won't have rapid access to supports if they are not in schools. Mental health services in the territory need to be accessible and responsive to the needs of residents, especially children and youth. I want to see the GNWT make careers in mental health accessible and attractive to community members, to help ensure that children and youth are able to receive culturally safe mental health care in their own communities. This also means ensuring that mental health providers are supported, compensated, and not overburdened with impossible caseloads and bureaucratic barriers.

NGOs play an important role in supporting youth mental health in the NWT and have demonstrated success in engaging youth. FOXY/SMASH has shown us that arts-based approaches to supporting child and youth health have important benefits. The Western Arctic Youth Collective has also been critical to responding to youth mental health crises at the community level. I look forward to supporting the work of NGOs by calling for consistent funding to allow this important work to continue, and to build closer relationships between government and NGOs to ensure that the expertise of folks working directly with youth is being considered in policy and planning.

8. How will you ensure that mental health and addiction services are accessible and adequately funded to enhance the well-being of all Northwest Territories residents?

Response: These issues, which represent a baseline for wellness for our residents, must take top priority for the 20th Assembly. The role of government is to support communities by paying attention to residents and to be guided by their priorities, concerns and needs. I'd argue the old way of parceling out responsibilities on these core social needs is not working – a whole of government, and whole of Cabinet response has to be fundamental to how we move forward, including better coordination of policies and services among government departments to eliminate the need for individuals already struggling to "chase" services from multiple sources and a more holistic approach to funding related services across departments. None of these issues are new, nor are they going away without dedicated and priority resources, actions, and measurable outcomes.