

Northwest Territories Association of Communities

2025 FEDERAL ELECTION PLATFORM

The Northwest Territories Association of Communities (NWTAC) has prepared this Federal Election Platform in order to make prospective candidates aware of the issues that are of extreme importance to NWT Communities.

The submission has been prepared by the NWTAC on the basis of the adopted resolutions of our 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.

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 (FCM).

1. Infrastructure Funding

NWT communities are underfunded by approximately \$40 million annually – a shortfall of 37% for operating costs, infrastructure, and water and sewage.

The NWT is a jurisdiction with an acknowledged lack of infrastructure, so it has been very heartening to see additional funding being allocated to municipal infrastructure in the last few federal budgets. The doubling of the Canada Community Building Fund (CCBF) was particularly welcome. We would strongly encourage this to become permanent and be enhanced.

The CCBF works very well in the NWT and neighbouring Northern territories because of its flexibility and predictability and because it does not require cost-sharing and is base

plus. Further, its flexibility and allocation basis mean that projects are chosen based on community priorities – which is in keeping with the focus on Asset Management as being encouraged by all levels of government.

The CCBF addresses many of the challenges with traditional application-based programs by reducing administrative burdens, maximizing project flexibility and increasing the federal share of eligible costs. These elements need to be incorporated into any federal Infrastructure Program.

INFRASTRUCTURE STIMULATES LOCAL ECONOMIES

Building communities in the North is important for local social and economic sustainability. A recent study completed for NWTAC by the Conference Board of Canada Centre for the North showed that for every million dollars invested at a community level, 13 jobs are created as compared to roughly half that for Federal and Territorial direct spending.

Getting funds to community governments is one of the most efficient ways to stimulate the economy in a timely and effective manner and thus make the most effective impact on the recovery. Further it serves to address long standing challenges and gaps.

CHALLENGES FOR BUILDING & MAINTAINING INFRASTRUCTURE

The unique conditions of Northern and remote communities greatly affect how municipal infrastructure is built and maintained. Northern communities face:

- Extreme isolation and shipping challenges;
- A shorter and highly variable construction season;
- Limited human resource availability and capacity;
- Limited access to funding;
- Growing demands on aging and existing infrastructure;
- Early stages of corporate development, and
- Unique project needs.

CLOSING THE INFRASTRUCTURE GAP

The Government of the Northwest Territories has proposed closing the infrastructure gap by completing works like the Mackenzie Valley Highway as a way to increase Canada's contribution to NATO.

Recommendations:

- That the government explore more programs to fund infrastructure.
- The Canadian Community Building Fund works very well in the NWT because it is flexible, predictable and does not require cost sharing. All future infrastructure programs should be designed the same way.
- Construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway as part of Canada's NATO contribution.
- Make the investments necessary to reduce the Northern Infrastructure Gap.

2. Climate Change

Climate change isn't a distant, abstract problem in the NWT – it's here now and NWT communities are at the forefront of the climate change challenge.

The NWT, especially the Mackenzie Valley, is a global hot spot for climate change with average annual temperatures increasing about 2°C since the 1940s when records started to be collected. This increase is even more pronounced the further north you travel; for example, annual temperatures in Inuvik, situated at the mouth of the Mackenzie River near the Beaufort Sea, have increased by 3°C.

The rapid warming, at 2 to 4 times the rate as the rest of Canada, is causing significant changes in the natural environment including ice, permafrost, water, vegetation and wildlife. The frequency and severity of extreme weather events is also increasing. These changes are causing problems for human health, public safety, food security, infrastructure and economic and cultural activities.

Some of the challenges include:

- Permafrost Thaw
- Flooding and Extreme Weather
- Coastal and River Erosion
- Wildfires
- Unsafe Access to the Land
- Human Health and Well Being
- Transportation (ice roads, sea-lift, airports)
- Water and Waste
- Agriculture and Food Security
- Economic Development

Extreme weather conditions shorten the life of many assets in the North, and climate change, which is occurring two to four times more rapidly than in the south, exacerbates this effect.

2023 saw 70% of the entire NWT evacuate due to wildfires. Although 2024 was more moderate in terms of wildfires, low water levels led to the cancellation of the barge resupply program (severely impacting many NWT communities without road access) and a shift of energy supply in Yellowknife from hydro to diesel.

FISCAL IMPACT AND FEDERAL SUPPORT

Federal focus on the climate change challenge to date has been on flooding and wildfires as those are the primary imminent risks in the south – but they are just two of the many climate change challenges being faced in the North.

The scale of the Climate Change Challenge in the NWT far exceeds the capacity of the Territorial or local governments to address. It will require a considerable fiscal investment by the federal government first to finish articulating the scope and scale of the challenge as well as actually mitigating and addressing those impacts.

The NWTAC has completed a study showing the fiscal impact of permafrost decay alone on public infrastructure will be in the order of \$1.3 billion.

Given the role this region plays in national sovereignty and supporting resource development, these investments should be seen as critical to nation building.

We already have had many strong partnerships with the various federal departments including CanNor, CIRNAC, Housing Infrastructure and Communities Canada.

Recommendations:

- That the Federal Government ensures that adequate funding is being provided to Territorial Governments, Indigenous Governments and Local Governments to ensure that they are well equipped to meet the Climate Change challenge.
- The design of any programs to support climate change in the North must be done in consultation with Northerners to ensure that they have uptake and are effective.
- Increase funding for the Disaster Mitigation and Adaption Fund (DMAF).
- Climate Change impacts on water levels, shortened ice road seasons, barge season cancellations and creating the need for construction are also having significant impact on the cost of living.

3. Housing & Homelessness

31.7% of NWT people have a housing problem while 19% of NWT households are in core housing need.

Key contributors to homelessness in NWT are the inability to pay for housing, and addiction/mental health rates that are double the national average. As a percentage of 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.

INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF HOUSING

The dire state of housing inadequacy requires extraordinary allocation of federal funds to overcome the deficit in the housing supply. A long-term federal funding commitment for housing is critical to address the unmet housing needs of NWT residents.

Affordable housing agreements must be flexible and respect provincial and territorial jurisdictions, chronic homelessness and inadequacy of housing must be eliminated through proven strategies; tax incentives or other measures must be used to stimulate new rental and affordable housing construction; and special territorial funding transfers are required to preserve and renovate existing social housing units.

HOUSEHOLDS IN CORE NEED

In the majority of NWT communities, heavy reliance upon public housing is required as a result of high unemployment and the lack of a private housing market. The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) spends roughly 25 times more per capita on housing than does a typical Canadian province. Relative to the rest of Canada, more NWT residents live in more crowded conditions and in housing more in need of major repair. The percentage of households in core need (households with a housing problem and income below the core need income threshold) stands at 12% in communities considered to have a private housing market, and 42% in non-market communities. Although rental vacancy rates are rising in Yellowknife (the only community where data is available), there is no territory-wide estimate of the volume of the shortfall in housing units. The NWT Housing Corporation routinely reports waiting lists for housing units in excess of 400 applicants.

In its national campaign, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has identified lack of affordable housing as “the most urgent financial issue facing Canadians today.” The NWT Association of Communities adopted a resolution calling lack of housing “a violation of human dignity and of human rights...representing the most extreme form of poverty and deprivation” and called on the government to “direct and fund its departments to end homelessness in the Northwest Territories.”

Progress on overcoming the deficit in affordable, adequate and available housing in the NWT cannot be achieved without a renewed federal commitment to funding the construction and renewal of social and affordable housing, through a national housing strategy. Although some progress has been made on this front, increased investments are still required.

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

Investment in housing as part of the economic stimulus for recovery is critical and it is likely to create work opportunities within the individual communities and it is critical to attract workers to the NWT.

HOUSING MARKET AND CHALLENGES*

The NWT has limited private market rental options, especially in smaller communities. Combined with low vacancy rates, there is a serious need for more market rental units.

Compared to the national average (63.7%), the ownership rate in NWT is 53.7%. There are limited incentives and investment in

private housing due to limited resale in smaller communities, high operating costs, and absence of a housing services sector.

The NWT's vast and remote landscape faces many unique challenges to the provision of housing. Long and cold winters mean that housing has to be built to a higher standard than what is required in the south, and we have a shorter time window to build in.

Transportation logistics also drastically increases the cost of construction, transportation, and renovation.

There are also challenges with respect to:

- The lack of housing markets in most communities;
- High incidence of adequacy (need for major repair) problems;
- Aging infrastructure;
- Requiring more rigorous building standards;
- Rural and remote communities without all-season road access;
- Limited construction and repair capacity, and
- Climate change effects such as permafrost degradation and soil erosion.

* NWT Housing Action Plan: 2019-2022

Recommendations:

- Require extraordinary allocation of federal funds to overcome the deficit in the housing supply. A long-term federal funding commitment for housing is critical to address the unmet housing needs of NWT residents.
- Affordable housing agreements must be flexible and respect provincial and territorial jurisdictions; chronic homelessness and inadequacy of housing must be eliminated through proven strategies; tax incentives or other measures must be used to stimulate new rental and affordable housing construction; and special territorial funding transfers are required to preserve and renovate existing social housing units.

4. Reconciliation, Mental Health & Social Determinants of Health

So much of the ability of the NWT to move forward is tied to Reconciliation and the social determinants of health including housing and homelessness and other areas such as employment, education, early childhood development, food security, and mental health and addictions.

TRUTH & RECONCILIATION

CALL TO ACTION #21

We call upon the federal government to provide sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools, and to ensure that the funding of healing centres in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is a priority.

UPSTREAM VS. DOWNSTREAM

There are actions that can be taken to support community healing. When we think of the analogy of a person falling into a river who may face the danger of drowning, 'upstream' interventions are actions that are taken to prevent people from falling into the river, while 'downstream' actions are taken to either provide the person in the river with a lifejacket, or farther along the way, to pull them from the river to prevent them from drowning.

Effective and meaningful actions can be taken at any point along the river, but the really impactful actions for the both the individual and the community, are those that address the root causes to prevent people from falling into the river in the first place. They are investment in social, economic, policy and regulatory structures that make it possible for everyone to meet their full potential.

Recommendations:

- Implement the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework to create a future where Northern and Arctic people are thriving, strong and safe.
- Implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls for Justice in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples.
- Adequately fund the provision of Mental Health and Addictions treatment to allow the Territories to move beyond the harm reduction model that is not even being achieved.

5. National Prosperity Partnership

NWT residents, like all Canadians, are living in a time of political volatility as the United States wages a trade war against Canada and other allies. This attack on our economy can only exacerbate the cost-of-living crisis facing Northerners and other Canadians. We need all levels of government to work together on a National Prosperity Partnership. This partnership will ensure that municipalities – which create the conditions for economic growth – can reinvest in a stronger, more resilient Canada.

The NWT Association of Communities and our partner organizations, such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, encourage the federal government to focus on the following priorities:

- **Priority #1**
Support local economic growth and resilience so communities can attract businesses and ensure good jobs for Canadians.
- **Priority #2**
Invest in infrastructure renewal to drive productivity and competitiveness.
- **Priority #3**
Achieve housing affordability so Canadians, especially young Canadians, can look to their future with confidence.
- **Priority #4**
End homelessness with solutions that work at the local level.
- **Priority #5**
Keep communities safe and support vital emergency services.
- **Priority #6**
Reduce economic disruption by investing in climate-resilient infrastructure.

**For more information of the NWTAC platform for the
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The NWTAC office is open from 9 AM to Noon and 1 PM to 5 PM Monday to Friday.