



NWT ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITIES

FALL 2025 ADVOCACY WEEK

FINAL REPORT

Dated 18 November 2025

Prepared by URSA Consulting Group



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From October 20–24, 2025, the Northwest Territories Association of Communities (NWTAC) undertook an intensive federal advocacy week, **meeting with 14 federal ministers, parliamentary secretaries, deputy ministers, associate deputy ministers, and senior staff.**

This series of engagements provided an opportunity to advance NWTAC’s message that strong, resilient communities are foundational to Canada’s nation-building, sovereignty, climate adaptation, and economic transformation agenda.



Across all meetings, federal officials recognized:

- 1) Northern realities require dedicated approaches: flexible, portfolio-based, and community-led.
- 2) Infrastructure and housing are enabling conditions, not stand-alone asks.
- 3) Sovereignty and climate resilience depend on thriving communities, not isolated federal assets.
- 4) Municipal partners are essential implementers with unmatched local insight and on-the-ground capacity.

NWTAC successfully positioned itself as the unified voice of all 33 communities, consistently demonstrating how investing in community governments directly advances federal priorities and facilitates the federal mandate to build infrastructure “*at speeds not seen in generations.*”

B. ADVOCACY WEEK AT A GLANCE



Ministers:

- Hon. Rebecca Alty, MP for the Northwest Territories
Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations
- Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, MP for Edmonton Centre
Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience
Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada
- Hon. Rebecca Chartrand, MP for Churchill-Keewatinook Aski
Minister of Northern and Arctic Affairs
Minister responsible for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency

Secretary of State:

- Hon. Buckley Bélanger, MP for Desnethé-Missinippi-Churchill River
Secretary of State for Rural Development

Parliamentary Secretary:

- Maggie Chi, MP for Don Valley North
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health

Opposition MPs:

- Scott Aitchison, MP for Parry-Sound-Muskoka
Official Opposition Housing Critic

Senior PMO / Ministerial Staff:

- Celine Yegani, Prairies and North Advisor
Prime Minister's Office
- Natalie Woodland, Regional Advisor
Office of the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change
- Jaeda Schilke, Regional Advisor
Western and Northern Desk, Office of the Minister of Health

Deputy Ministers / ADMs:

- Paul Halucha, Deputy Minister
Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada
- Mollie Johnson, Deputy Minister
Environment and Climate Change Canada
- Jimi Onalik, President
Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency
- Rob Wright, Associate Deputy Minister
Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada
- Natasha Kim Associate, Deputy Minister
National Defence

Key Outcomes

Expressed federal support for dedicated northern housing and infrastructure streams.	Strong alignment on dual-use and enabling infrastructure (community & DND).	Shared concern around climate-driven supply chain disruption and emergency management readiness for communities, industry, and defence.
Receptiveness to immigration/labour pilots designed for the North.	Commitment to exploring guardianship, Rangers, and Coast Guard as integrated sovereignty tools.	Clear interest in AGM participation from nearly every office.

C. WHAT WE HEARD : KEY FEDERAL THEMES AND INSIGHTS

1. Infrastructure Funding & Cost of Living

Federal officials were candid about the limits of existing national programs and the need for Northern-specific approaches.

- **Deputy Minister Halucha** acknowledged national programs are not designed for Northern realities and was open to a dedicated Northern housing and infrastructure framework, similar to Nunavut’s model.
- Officials highlighted the Canada Community-Building Fund as a model for future programs due to its flexibility, predictability, and low administrative burden.
- **Secretary of State Bélanger** recognized that current federal procurement rules often disadvantage Northern businesses.
- Senior officials agreed that municipal infrastructure is foundational to housing, defence, and economic development.
- CIRNAC emphasized that proposals gain traction when framed as long-term national investments that advance prosperity and sovereignty.



Federal Perspective:

Infrastructure gaps must be addressed to reduce cost of living and enable housing, economic growth, and federal priorities across the North. Funding will be confirmed faster where there are areas of consensus amongst communities, levels of government and other stakeholders.

2. Climate Resilience & Adaptation

Climate discussions drew strong reactions from federal officials and reinforced their understanding of the North’s accelerating climate impacts.

- **Deputy Minister Mollie Johnson** expressed serious concern after hearing community evidence of health risks linked to downstream tailings pond drainage, and indicated interest in receiving more detailed information.
- Federal representatives acknowledged that current disaster and emergency programs are still designed for southern conditions, and do not adequately address permafrost thaw, low-water supply disruptions, shortened construction seasons, or barge cancellations.

- Several departments noted that climate impacts are advancing more rapidly in the Northwest Territories than in the rest of Canada, strengthening the case for Northern-specific design standards and accelerated adaptation planning.
- Guardianship programs were widely recognized as essential frontline climate monitoring systems, supporting community safety, data collection, environmental protection, and sovereignty.

Federal Perspective:

Climate adaptation in the North is increasingly recognized not only as an environmental imperative, but also as a key factor affecting development, community well-being, and sovereignty. The federal government acknowledges that climate change poses a significant risk to critical infrastructure and that communities are directly threatened by its impacts, from natural disasters to melting permafrost, as well as the growing risks associated with increased Arctic shipping activity. At the same time, it was noted that climate change may also create certain opportunities, including potential shifts in farming and other forms of adaptation. The importance of ensuring that harvesters can continue to access the land was also highlighted.

3. Housing & Homelessness

Housing issues resonated strongly with federal officials, with clear alignment on the urgency.

- **Conservative MP Aitchison** showed strong interest in reusing vacant federal housing units, requesting follow-up details.
- **Deputy Minister Halucha** confirmed work is underway to develop Northern-specific housing mechanisms, including portfolio funding and retrofit-focused models.
- Officials reacted strongly to the data showing that nearly half of NWT households lack adequate, suitable, or affordable housing, alongside the country’s highest per-capita homelessness rate.
- Departments increasingly viewed housing as essential to workforce growth, immigration retention, and defence readiness, not only as a social policy issue.



Federal Perspective:

There is strong interest in new housing pathways, including asset transfers, retrofits, and delivery models adapted to Northern realities.

4. Sovereignty & National Security

Federal officials demonstrated a clear understanding that community capacity is central to Canada's sovereignty in the North. The alignment of interests and the clear focus on Northern and Arctic issues is a feature of this new government.

- **Associate Deputy Minister Natasha Kim** emphasized that defence investments can revitalize communities, and confirmed that municipal infrastructure is essential to expanding federal operational capacity.
- Defence officials highlighted more than \$100 million in annual operations across the territories, underscoring the North's importance within Canada's defence plans.
- Several departments recognized the value of integrating Guardians, Canadian Rangers, and the Coast Guard into a coordinated, Northern-led security and monitoring system.
- Increased High Arctic shipping, unknown vessels, and spill risks were identified as areas requiring stronger local readiness and dual-use infrastructure.
- Senior officials reinforced that major corridors, such as the Mackenzie Valley Highway, should be framed as sovereignty infrastructure, supporting national security and economic resilience.

Federal Perspective:

Sovereignty, and Canada's ability to respond appropriately and rapidly to emerging risks, depends on the development of thriving, well-serviced northern communities, not solely on isolated military assets. Funding has now been confirmed to support the development of defence infrastructure and assets in the North, and the cities of Yellowknife and Inuvik are particularly well positioned to benefit from these investments.

5. Reconciliation, Health, Mental Wellness & Social Determinants

Meetings showed strong alignment on the need for Northern-led, culturally grounded health approaches.

- **Parliamentary Secretary Maggie Chi** acknowledged major navigation barriers in federal health and dental programs, especially for residents with limited access or unclear eligibility.
- Officials recognized that needing navigators to access basic programs reflects deeper design issues.
- Health Canada representatives expressed openness to community-driven healing models, including aftercare, on-the-land programming, and prevention-focused supports.
- Investments were linked to Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #21, emphasizing the importance of social determinants.

Federal Perspective:

Health and wellness programs will require redesign to reflect Northern realities, simplified access, Indigenous partnership, and community-driven delivery.

6. Economic Growth, Jobs & Workforce / Immigration

Federal discussions highlighted the North’s expanding role in Canada’s economic and demographic future.

- **Minister Rebecca Chartrand** showed strong interest in a Northern skilled-immigration parallel to a local skills development pilot tied to labour shortages and supported by housing availability.



- The Minister also spoke about food security projects and entrepreneurship support coming through new programs.
- Several departments reacted to the evidence that every \$1 million invested locally creates 13 jobs, reinforcing the impact of community-led delivery.
- Officials emphasized that workforce attraction depends on housing, health supports, and stable community infrastructure.
- Economic development offices expressed interest in Northern food-economy innovation, including vertical farming, local fisheries, and processing models suited to remote communities.

Federal Perspective:

The Northwest Territories is increasingly viewed as a strategic region for workforce growth and economic development, requiring coordinated federal action.

7. Climate-Emergency Management & Community Readiness

Discussions revealed significant structural gaps in emergency preparedness and coordination.

- **Minister Eleanor Olszewski** expressed concern that airport personnel were evacuated before residents, undermining emergency operations.
- Federal officials acknowledged that satellite communications have become essential emergency infrastructure.
- Representatives were struck by how RCMP redeployment can trigger cascading service reductions in small communities.
- Departments showed interest in improving logistics planning, aviation readiness, and community-level preparedness.
- There was openness to exploring a stronger municipal role in the Arctic Security Group.



Federal Perspective:

Northern emergency readiness is seen as a national resilience issue, and federal departments are open to co-designing improved systems with Northern communities.

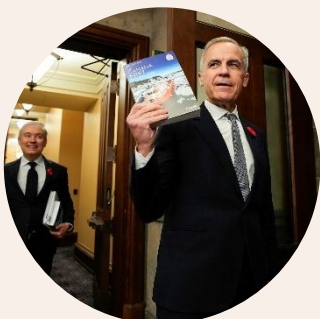
D. CLOSING NOTE

Advocacy Week underscored a simple but important truth: **when Northern communities speak with clarity and unity, federal leaders listen differently.** The conversations held throughout the week reflected a shift in how Ottawa understands the North — not as a distant region, but as a place central to Canada’s future prosperity, climate resilience, and sovereignty.

The themes, commitments, and questions raised by federal officials point to a moment of real opportunity. The follow-up items captured in this report are more than administrative tasks; they represent openings to shape policy, influence program design, and ensure that Northern priorities are reflected in decisions being made now. These items can form the basis of an ongoing advocacy and government relations plan.

The next major point of convergence will be the NWTAC Annual General Meeting in February 2026. It will be the moment to reinforce the messages delivered in Ottawa, re-engage federal partners, and demonstrate the progress communities have made. Ensuring strong federal presence at the AGM will help sustain the momentum built during Advocacy Week and carry it into the next cycle of decisions, funding opportunities, and national conversations.

As this work continues, the foundation laid through Advocacy Week provides a strong starting point. The months ahead will be critical in turning federal attention into meaningful outcomes for communities across the Northwest Territories.



“Budget 2025 is our plan to build Canada strong - with major infrastructure projects, millions more homes, new defence industries, and thousands of new high-quality careers all across our country.”

E. APPENDIX : FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS & NEXT STEPS

Minister Rebecca Alty – Crown Indigenous Relations

- 1) Provide details on federally owned housing units that may be transferred, including “vacant or underused” assets identified by communities.
- 2) Share input related to tailings ponds, community impacts, and ongoing concerns.
- 3) Coordinate follow-up on the Major Projects Office pathway with PMO.
- 4) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.

Minister Eleanor Olszewski – Emergency Management & Community Resilience

- 1) Provide documentation on the United Way emergency-management pilot.
- 2) Follow up on logistics-planning needs, including the request for a federal logistics specialist.
- 3) Provide details related to evacuation sequencing, including airport personnel.
- 4) Explore options for municipal involvement in the Arctic Security Group.
- 5) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.



Minister Rebecca Chartrand – Northern Affairs / CanNor

- 1) Provide models and examples of community-led food system innovation (greenhouses, fisheries, processing).
- 2) Share municipal–First Nation collaboration examples relevant to Northern pilots.
- 3) Follow up on Northern immigration and skills pathways, linked to labour shortages.
- 4) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.

Secretary of State Buckley Bélanger – Rural Development

- 1) Provide examples of how federal procurement rules disadvantage Northern businesses.
- 2) Share more examples of land access constraints, flooding impacts, and supply-chain challenges.
- 3) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.

Parliamentary Secretary Maggie Chi – Health

- 1) Provide a summary of barriers to accessing federal health and dental programs (e.g., navigation, eligibility, connectivity).
- 2) Share examples of community-led healing models, aftercare, on-the-land programs, and culturally grounded supports.
- 3) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.

Member of Parliament Scott Aitchison – Housing & Infrastructure Critic

- 1) Provide detailed information on vacant federal housing, including Fort Simpson RCMP units, and any similar assets in other communities.
- 2) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.

Prime Minister's Office – Céline Yegani

- 1) Provide NWTAC's federal budget proposal.
- 2) Share details on vacant federal housing units and asset reuse opportunities.
- 3) Provide information to support connections with the Major Projects Office, coordinated with Minister Alty.
- 4) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.
- 5) Keep PMO updated on northern developments, federal travel opportunities, and community events.

Natalie Woodland – Office of Minister of Environment (Julie Dabrusin)

- 1) Share community stories and climate impacts to support ministerial policy development.
- 2) Provide materials on Guardianship programs and Northern emergency experiences.
- 3) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.

Jaeda Schilke – Office of Minister of Health (Marjorie Michel)

- 1) Provide additional examples of community-led wellness, aftercare, and prevention approaches.
- 2) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.

Deputy Minister Paul Halucha – Housing, Infrastructure & Communities

- 1) Provide detailed list of vacant federal housing units, including the 13 empty RCMP units in Fort Simpson.
- 2) Provide information to support development of Northern-specific housing mechanisms, including portfolio and retrofit options.
- 3) Share examples linking core infrastructure to housing readiness.
- 4) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.

Deputy Minister Mollie Johnson – Environment & Climate Change

- 1) Share community-level information on tailings pond impacts, water quality, and related health concerns.
- 2) Provide Guardianship program examples tied to environmental monitoring and safety.
- 3) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.

President & Deputy Minister Jimi Onalik – CanNor

- 1) Provide examples that illustrate shared Northern priorities for Arctic strategy development.
- 2) Share community impacts of major infrastructure sequencing (highways, radar, hubs).
- 3) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.

Deputy Minister Rob Wright – Crown Indigenous Relations

- 1) Share materials demonstrating unified Northern positioning for major corridors and infrastructure.
- 2) Provide examples on how communities frame projects as investment, not expenditure.
- 3) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.

Associate Deputy Minister Natasha Kim – National Defence

- 1) Provide examples showing how municipal infrastructure supports defence readiness.
- 2) Share community priorities relating to rail link, Coast Guard integration, spill response, and Arctic logistics.
- 3) Provide AGM invitation and participation details.