



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee
Report 12-20(1): Report on the Review of the 2023-2024
Annual Report of the Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission**

Background

The Standing Committee on Government Operations conducted a review of the Human Rights Commission 2023-2024 annual report. The report summarizing their review was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on October 22, 2024. It included three recommendations.

The following is the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) response to the recommendations contained in Committee Report 12-20(1): *Report on the Review of the 2023-2024 Annual Report of the Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission*.

Recommendation 1

“The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories develop accessibility legislation that identifies, removes, and prevents barriers encountered by people with disabilities in their daily lives through the development, implementation, and enforcement of accessibility standards.

Accessibility standards should provide guidance about best practices for accessibility, including desired accessibility outcomes. Standards should cover a variety of areas including service delivery, employment, the built environment, information and communication, and transportation.”

GNWT Response:

The GNWT is not contemplating the development of accessibility legislation at this time, however, GNWT departments individually and collectively work to identify, remove, and prevent barriers encountered by people with disabilities as follows:

- The NWT Disability Strategic Framework: 2017-2027 revealed inadequate access to equitable and supportive housing for persons with disabilities in the NWT. In response, the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) aimed to develop a renewed person and family-centered model for **Supported Living** services. The new model aligns with the goal of providing community-based, culturally safe, and individualized supports; and will enable participation, community-based living and inclusion, and advance accessibility and equity. In 2024, HSS also shared a draft Guidance to Accessibility Standards Canada document with appropriate departments for feedback. The document provides guidance to better integrate jurisdictional considerations into efforts by Accessibility Standards Canada to develop accessibility standards and will eventually be shared through a Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Accessibility Forum.

- The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) works with education bodies to provide training within the school system to enable support assistants so they can properly support students with complex needs. Education bodies have an obligation to provide students with support services to ensure they can access the education program in a regular instructional setting in a public school, in accordance with the **Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling**.

A review of inclusive schooling is currently underway and will span into the third year of the 20th Assembly. It will assess the extent to which NWT schools have met the Ministerial Directive's intended objectives and student needs. This project will provide recommendations to ensure schools are equipped to provide supports for all students, and ensure that the legislation, policies and guidelines implementing the Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling align with the Northwest Territories *Education Act* and Article 24 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

- In July 2024, ECE launched a new targeted income assistance program for seniors and persons with disabilities. The **Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Program** is for individuals 60 years of age and older and those over the age of 19 who have a permanent or long-term disability. Eligible recipients are only required to apply once per year and receive a guaranteed amount of benefits each month, which enables them to budget for their monthly costs more effectively and reduce previously onerous reporting requirements.
- A significant proportion of NWT residents do not have enough schooling to meet the forecasted NWT job demand in the immediate to near future. **Skills 4 Success (S4S)** is the NWT's overarching labour market strategy and aims to support NWT residents to gain the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for employment success. Together with the NWT **Post-Secondary Education Strategic Framework 2019-2029** and the new **Post-Secondary Education Act**, these guiding documents aim to help NWT residents obtain a post-secondary education, skill or trade from institutions that are student-centered, accessible, high quality, relevant and accountable to maximize opportunities for those in or entering the NWT workforce. A **Post-Secondary Education Accountability Framework** was established in July 2024, creating a reporting structure for the post-secondary education system in the NWT, and includes a requirement that post-secondary institutions monitor application and acceptance data for individuals who identify as having a disability.
- ECE provides specific supports under the **Student Financial Assistance (SFA)** program to support students with disabilities. These supports include study grants that assist with tuition, books, travel, accommodation and services and equipment. The SFA program also supports students with disabilities by reducing the required courseload per semester from 60% to 40%.

- ECE’s **Labour Market Programs** provide special consideration for persons with disabilities, enabling them to access funding for services and supports above regular program limits when necessary in order to complete training. This includes additional funding for assistive or specialized equipment or devices and funds for mentoring, tutoring, and ground transportation to training and related services. Clients providing documentation from a supporting professional (such as doctor, health nurse or community health representative), and quote(s) for equipment or services, may be eligible. Support amounts are determined on a case-by-case basis and costs are reimbursed to clients once receipts are provided to the Department.
- The Department of Infrastructure (INF) continues to show leadership on this topic through the planning, design and construction of GNWT-owned infrastructure incorporating accessibility requirements from CSA B651 “Accessible Design for the Built Environment”. The **GNWT Good Building Practices for Northern Facilities** 4th edition also incorporates guidelines for accessibility in the built environment (in section H7-Accessibility).
- INF is advancing development of a **Building Standards Framework for the Northwest Territories**. This is a large, multi-departmental initiative requiring dedicated funding, resources, coordination, and a substantive engagement process. INF, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA), and Housing NWT will continue to work together to develop the scope, resource plan and a schedule in 2024-25. It is anticipated that this Framework would include requirements related to accessibility as it relates to the built environment.
- MACA’s *Fire Prevention Act* does not directly address accessibility; however, the **Fire Prevention Regulations** adopt the National Model Construction Codes. The latest edition of the 2020 National Building Code of Canada (NBC 2020) incorporates several improvements for accessibility. Requirements are updated to reduce barriers related to anthropometrics, plumbing facilities, signage, entrance and elevators. MACA has adopted the NBC 2020 through an update to the *Fire Prevention Regulations* that came into force October 1, 2024, and intends to adopt the 2025 NBC once released.
- The Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs (EIA) continues to explore ways to reduce silos or barriers between departments and agencies in order to make programs more accessible to all residents. During the life of the 20th Assembly, EIA will develop, build and launch a new and improved **GNWT web presence**. This project will consolidate departmental websites into a unified platform. The new website will improve resident experience by organizing content around programs, services, tasks, and information that are important to residents, instead of organizing around departmental structure. The project aims to improve the public's ability to access services and find and use government information and resources efficiently.

The new site will also meet [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG) 2.1 AA Standard as a minimum, and AAA Standard where possible. WCAG provides standards for ensuring website and web content is perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust with consideration for technical and display features that enable those who are disabled to interact with online content. Some examples of improvements or changes include:

- Considerations for font size and font resizing in your browser.
- Considerations for colour contrast to support legibility and visibility.
- The site works with assistive technologies like screen readers. Text is displayed so screen readers can read it. Text is not embedded in images where screen readers can't read it easily.
- Content is written to meet standards, is at appropriate reading levels and written in plain language.
- Considerations for how users navigate, find content, determine where they are, and interact with the web interface.

Recommendation 2

“The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories integrate CSA B651:23 into the recommended accessibility legislation.”

GNWT Response:

CSA B651:23 Accessible design for the built environment is incorporated into the **GNWT Good Building Practices for Northern Facilities**, a technical reference design guide for building designers and developers, under section H7- Accessibility.

Recommendation 3

“The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to the recommendations contained in this report within 120 days.”

GNWT Response:

The GNWT is pleased to provide this response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations.