



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 32-20(1):
Report on the Review of the 2024-2025 Annual Report of the
Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission**

Background

The Standing Committee on Government Operations conducted a review of the Human Rights Commission 2024-2025 annual report. The report summarizing their review was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on October 29, 2025. It included five recommendations.

The following is the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) response to the recommendations contained in Committee Report 32-20(1): *Report on the Review of the 2024-2025 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.”

GNWT Response:

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

- The Department of Infrastructure (INF) is advancing development of a Building Standards Framework for the Northwest Territories which is anticipated to formally adopt several of the model national codes at a territorial level. As noted in the GNWT’s response to the previous recommendation from Committee, this is a large, multi-departmental initiative requiring a substantive engagement process. INF, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA), and Housing NWT are

continuing to work together to advance this initiative. 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 on October 1, 2024, and intends to adopt the 2025 NBC once released.
- In the design and construction of new hospitals or health centres, the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) utilizes the current Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standards related to accessibility at the time of building. There is no legal obligation or expectation to have older buildings retrofitted to whatever the current standard is as some CSA codes are updated more frequently than would be reasonable or financially feasible to meet. However, if the retrofit is simple enough and not significantly costly, it would be considered.
- The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) works with education bodies to provide training within the school system to enable support assistants to 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 *Education Act* and 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, directives, policies and guidelines align with the *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 (IASPD) 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 may 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.

- ECE provides specific supports under the Student Financial Assistance (SFA) program to assist 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 course load per semester from 60% to 40% of a 100% full course load.
- 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 post-secondary education, a skill or a 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'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 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 who provide 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 Government of the Northwest Territories' Duty to Accommodate Injury and Disability Policy (2017) extends beyond current employees to include candidates during the hiring process. The policy requires the GNWT to provide reasonable accommodations, such as modified interview formats, assistive technologies and flexible testing conditions, to ensure that applicants with disabilities have equal opportunity to compete for employment.

- Complementing this, the GNWT’s Learning and Development Policy (2017) supports training for managers and human resource staff on inclusive hiring practices that emphasize the importance of recognizing and addressing unconscious bias while incorporating accessibility considerations into recruitment processes. In addition, the Diversity and Inclusion Framework identifies further actions the government will take to remove barriers and enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities across its programs, services, and workplaces.

Recommendation 2

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

GNWT Response:

CSA B651:23 Accessible design for the built environment is incorporated into the GNWT’s *Good Building Practices for Northern Facilities* (GBP), a technical reference design guide for building designers and developers, under section H7-Accessibility. INF incorporates the National Building Code (NBC), the GBP and other requirements through contract language for the design and construction of new public facilities.

Recommendation 3

“The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories consider adding genetic discrimination to the NWT *Human Rights Act*.”

GNWT Response:

The issue of protection from genetic discrimination was previously raised in the NWT when amendments to the NWT *Human Rights Act* were considered by the 19th Legislative Assembly. In 2017, the Government of Canada enacted the federal *Genetic Non-Discrimination Act* (2017), which prevents third parties, such as employers and insurance companies under federal jurisdiction, from demanding genetic information from individuals and using that information against them. In 2020, the Supreme Court of Canada issued a ruling upholding the federal law. The ruling has implications for insurance companies and employers as both may face prosecution if convicted of using information from genetic tests for insurance or employment purposes. Insurers must also ensure that they have appropriate practices, policies and procedures in place to provide the opportunity for applicants to give meaningful consent.

The GNWT is committed to enhancing the protection of human rights in the NWT. At

the same time, the fact remains that no other province or territory has amended its human rights legislation to include the prohibition of discrimination on genetic grounds. This is a complex area and as a small jurisdiction the GNWT will continue to monitor developments in this area to inform future direction as implications for insurance companies, employers and privacy considerations are further clarified.

Recommendation 4

“The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories consider proclaiming October Disability Employment Awareness Month.”

GNWT Response:

The GNWT recognizes the benefits of diverse workforces and supports opportunities to promote and highlight employment inclusion and inclusive hiring in the NWT. The GNWT is pleased to contribute to the important advocacy work done through various organizations and align communication efforts with other jurisdictions and organizations to promote disability employment awareness in October. Through public communications, the GNWT will observe disability inclusion in October, highlighting the benefits of an inclusive labour market and the importance of supporting people with disabilities so they can fully participate in – and contribute to – workforces across the NWT.

Recommendation 5

“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.