

**Additional Information  
for Return to Oral Question 1071-20(1): Cost of  
Living**

**Department  
of  
Executive and Indigenous Affairs**

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## **Additional Information for Return to Oral Question 1071-20(1): Cost of Living**

This document provides additional information for Return to Oral Question 1071-20(1): Cost of Living dated February 24, 2026. It provides a comprehensive list and details of the extensive actions that the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has taken to support residents with the cost of living.

### Income Security Programs

The Government of the Northwest Territories offers a suite of financial support programs under Income Security Programs, designed to help residents with basic needs and the cost of living. Core programs include Income Assistance, Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities, the Senior Home Heating Subsidy, the NWT Child Benefit, and the NWT Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit.

In 2024, amendments to the Income Assistance regulations introduced a base benefit amount that reflects household size and the Northern Market Basket Measure for each region. This approach ensures that benefit levels align with actual costs across various regions in the territory. Clients are also eligible for additional benefits based on their circumstances, including shelter, utilities, childcare and security deposits. The unearned income exemption was increased to \$350 per month, replacing the previous annual limit of \$1,200, which allows individuals to retain more of their income rather than having it counted in their assessments. The Income Assistance program also increased earned income exemptions to \$500 per adult plus 25% of additional earnings. These changes allow individuals and families to keep more money while still contributing to their household.

In 2024, a new Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities program was created, which replaced the monthly application requirement with a single annual application and a consolidated basic benefit for food, clothing, and daily living costs, to improve accessibility and align benefit levels with the Northern Market Basket Measure for eligible applicants.

In addition, documentation and reporting requirements for the Income Assistance program have been streamlined through simplified verification processes and easier reporting for unearned income under the \$350 monthly exemption. Refusal periods have been reduced, which allows individuals to reapply sooner when their circumstances change.

In 2025, the Income Assistance program was updated to allow seniors and persons with disabilities who are not eligible under the Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities program to apply to the monthly Income Assistance program, ensuring there are no gaps in access to assistance. These changes improve access to assistance and help residents maintain stability while managing rising household costs.

The GNWT has strengthened the Student Financial Assistance program to reduce the cost of accessing postsecondary education and ease the long-term financial burden for residents. In Fall 2023, the program increased Basic Grant amounts for tuition and books, increased monthly living allowances through the Supplementary Grant and the Remissible Loan, and increased grant amounts for students with disabilities for services and equipment.

In 2024, the loan limit was increased from \$60,000 to \$90,000, and in 2025 the revolving student loan fund increased from \$45 million to \$55 million to ensure students have access to adequate financing as education costs rise. The program continues to offer loan repayment incentives for residents who remain in the NWT after studies, and include 0% interest and annual remission amounts based on community of residence. These measures reduce the overall cost of postsecondary participation and lessen the long-term financial impacts for graduates living in the territory.

In August 2025, in response to the rising cost of living, the GNWT permanently increased subsidy rates for the Senior Home Heating Subsidy. The subsidy assists low-to-moderate income seniors with their heating costs. Eligible seniors receive a monthly subsidy between September and April. In July 2024, with the introduction of the Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Program and the move to a single combined application for both Income Assistance and the Senior Home Heating Subsidy, many seniors who previously only applied for the subsidy are now qualifying for benefits under the Income Assistance for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities program and receiving a broader range of financial assistance than the subsidy alone provided.

The NWT Child Benefit and the NWT Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit continue to be available to eligible residents. These benefits are issued automatically through the Government of Canada's administration of the Canada Child Benefit, Old Age Security, and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, which reduces the need for residents to apply separately and ensures consistent access for those who qualify. Collaboration with the federal government also resulted in Child Care Fee Reduction to reduce childcare costs to an average of \$10/day.

### Labour Market Programs

Federal funding is provided through Labour Market Transfer Agreements for the GNWT to deliver training and employment programs that reduce the financial barriers associated with entering or reentering the workforce. Through these agreements, residents can access skills development, employment readiness training, and career planning without bearing the full cost themselves.

These programs provide individuals with the training or upskilling they need to participate in the labour market, while wage subsidies and employer training contributions help reduce hiring and training costs for employers in a high-cost environment.

## Minimum Wage

The GNWT adjusts the minimum wage annually on September 1 using a formula that considers the Consumer Price Index for Yellowknife and the average hourly wage in the Northwest Territories. This approach provides a predictable and transparent process that helps wages keep pace with inflation while giving businesses greater certainty for planning. On September 1, 2025, the minimum wage increased from \$16.70 to \$16.95.

## Food Security

The GNWT takes a comprehensive approach to food security, focusing on both immediate needs and long-term solutions. Food security efforts include supporting local food production, country food harvesting, and food storage. Although climate change has created challenges for food supply and traditional harvesting, programs like the Northern Food Development Program and federal partnerships help address these impacts.

Under the GNWT's \$1.75 million annual Anti-Poverty Fund, communities receive support for locally driven initiatives, many focused on improving food security. Funded food security projects provide direct assistance to residents through food hampers, community kitchens, and harvesting activities delivered by non-governmental organizations and Indigenous governments. The Anti-Poverty Fund, as well as the Healthy Choices Fund support local food initiatives, while community-based projects like meal programs receive funding from the Small Community Homelessness Fund. Schools and education bodies also receive support to provide healthy meals, and Indigenous governments use Community Wellness Initiatives to strengthen food security. In addition, the GNWT offers the Community Harvester Assistance Program and Indigenous governments can also access funds from partners such as Canadian Feed the Children for distribution to schools.

Federal partnerships remain key. The GNWT continues to advocate for federal support through frameworks like the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, while the Department of Education, Culture and Employment works with Canada on the National School Food Program. Additionally, Nutrition North Canada has expanded its support for isolated communities with subsidies and grants for traditional harvesting and food sharing. The GNWT's integrated efforts, combined with federal partnerships, provide a strong foundation for improving food security in the NWT.

## Housing NWT

Housing NWT Home Repair Programs include:

- **Emergency Repairs:** funding is available year-round to homeowners for emergency situations like freeze-ups and furnace failures.
- **Mobility Modifications:** funding is available for homeowners to improve the accessibility of homes for people with a disability to support modifications that will promote continued independent living.

- Preventative Maintenance: funding is available to homeowners for preventative maintenance checks and minor servicing or repairs to help maintain their homes.
- Seniors Aging in Place: funding is available for homeowners aged 60 and older to lower home energy costs or to do home repairs, helping NWT seniors keep living independently at home for as long as possible in their communities. This funding supports repairs/upgrades that make homes more efficient and less expensive to operate when it comes to heating, electricity, and water. Minor home adaptations like grab bars to improve accessibility and mobility are also eligible.
- Seniors Home Repair: funding is available for senior homeowners to make necessary health and safety-related repairs to their existing homes, helping to ensure a safe and healthy residence and to increase the useful economic life of the home.

The Home Purchase Program helps first-time homebuyers purchase a modest home with a forgivable loan for a down payment. The Homeownership Initiative Program assists eligible Public Housing clients transition to homeownership.

The Canada-NWT Housing Benefit is a federally funded program available to help with rental costs for households in the Northwest Territories paying more than 30% of their gross income on rent. Applicants may be eligible for rental assistance of up to \$800 per month.

The GNWT is expanding the criteria for forgiveness of debts under Housing NWT's legacy mortgage program. Residents with legacy Housing NWT mortgages may be eligible to have their remaining mortgage forgiven.

### Justice Services

Legal Aid has taken steps to make its services more accessible by broadening financial eligibility and applying greater flexibility in assessments. Changes include:

- Income exemptions now include child support, the Canada Child Benefit, education related grants, and reasonable family gifts, along with culturally significant or Indigenous related income such as treaty annuities and funds raised for ceremonies.
- The Executive Director may waive guidelines in cases of hardship and approve applicants with higher incomes or assets if they contribute financially.
- Repeat clients who were approved within the past year only undergo a full reassessment if their circumstances have materially changed.
- Asset limits have been increased, with applicants potentially ineligible if they hold significant real property or personal assets, although flexibility remains in family cases where equity is inaccessible.
- Financial eligibility thresholds have been significantly increased using updated 2024

Market Basket Measure data to reflect current living costs.

### Emergency Relief Funding

The NWT Emergency Evacuation Relief Program provides one-time financial support to help mitigate the immediate costs, such as accommodation and groceries, gas, and other essentials, associated with evacuations due to natural disasters. This program is designed to be accessible to all NWT residents, to ensure equitable support during emergencies.

Eligible residents who have evacuated their home community due to an official evacuation order will receive a one-time direct deposit payment of \$800 for residents ages 18 and over, and \$400 for each dependent under the age of 18.

In 2025 the Emergency Evacuation Relief Program provided assistance to:

- 314 people (adults and dependents) from Fort Good Hope received one-time financial assistance for the wildfire evacuation from June 16 to July 6, 2024, with total payments of \$216,000.
- 524 people (adults and dependents) from Whatì received one-time financial assistance for the wildfire evacuation from August 29 to September 6, 2025, with total payments of \$351,200.
- 688 people (adults and dependents) from Fort Providence received one-time financial assistance for the wildfire evacuation from August 31 to September 11, 2025, with total payments of \$493,200.

In summary, 1,526 people received \$1,060,400 in financial assistance through the Emergency Evacuation Relief Program for the three events.

### Structural Reform and Infrastructure

GNWT's continued investment in infrastructure projects create long-term cost reductions through improved efficiency and accessibility of services and resources. Transportation infrastructure such as the Mackenzie Valley Highway and the Arctic Economic and Security Corridor will improve regional and inter-jurisdictional connectivity, accessibility, and contribute to stabilizing the cost of living.

The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs' Water and Waste Services Funding helps community governments keep essential water and solid waste fees more affordable for residents. In addition, Municipal and Community Affairs provides funding and works closely with community governments to facilitate access to federal programs for essential municipal services and public infrastructure, reducing financial pressures on residents and supporting sustainable community development

### Energy and Power Rates

Under the 2030 Energy Strategy, the GNWT has invested in energy initiatives that support reliability and affordability. As of 2025, these investments had delivered about \$16 million in annual ongoing energy cost savings, directly reducing energy costs for NWT residents. This includes the following affordability and reliability investments over the past six years:

- Public-facing energy rebate and energy efficiency programs and services through the Arctic Energy Alliance for residents, communities, and businesses (\$37 million over six years).
- The Greenhouse Gas Grant Program (\$10 million over six years).
- Public Housing funding under Housing NWT's Energy Management Strategy.
- Allocation of federal infrastructure funding since 2018 to the Northwest Territories Power Corporation (NTPC) of \$250 million to 2030 to help offset the cost of major infrastructure upgrades and mitigate rate increases, including:
  - Diesel plant replacements
  - Hydropower asset overhauls (Taltson and Snare)
  - Renewable energy development
  - Transmission line construction
  - A natural gas project to displace diesel

The GNWT offers programs, and one-time funding support to help stabilize the cost of energy and support low-income households.

- Between 2018 and 2025, the GNWT invested over \$207 million in energy initiatives that support both reliability and affordability. These investments delivered about \$16 million in annual ongoing fuel saving across the NWT as of 2025, corresponding to a cumulative \$67 million in fuel savings.

In 2024-2025, ongoing GNWT funding amounted to \$18 million, which includes:

- The Territorial Power Support Program, which offers a subsidy on power costs to reduce the financial burden on residents outside of Yellowknife. This subsidy totaled \$8.8 million in 2024-2025. This program increased its annual budget to \$8.95 million in 2026-2027.
- The GNWT Rate Equalization Program, which is designed to equalize power rates across the territory by providing financial support to offset higher electricity rates in communities where power is supplied by NAKA Power, compared to communities supplied by NTPC. This subsidy totaled \$150,000 in 2024-2025.
- Government Electricity Rates, where governments in communities where power is supplied by NTPC can pay as much as 20% higher electricity rates to reduce rates for other clients. This subsidy totaled approximately \$6.9 million in 2024-2025.

- To further limit the cost of electricity for residents, the GNWT approved a short-term support effective February 1, 2026 to March 31, 2028, with the Cost of Living Subsidy. This subsidy is applied to communities where electricity is reliant on diesel or other fuel-based generation, and South Slave communities served by the Taltson hydro system.

The GNWT has provided several one-time capital and utility cost related subsidies. Recent subsidies include:

- In 2024-2025, \$30 million to NTPC to address a shortfall in the Rate Stabilization Fund, due to increased fuel costs, required because of low water levels within the Snare Hydro System.
- One-time support of \$38 million to offset the Inuvik Wind project capital costs increases.
- In 2025-2026, \$12 million to NTPC to address a shortfall in the Rate Stabilization Fund, due to increased fuel costs, required because of low water levels within the Snare Hydro System.
- In 2025-2026, GNWT announced funding of \$48 million to the NTPC between 2025 and 2028. Part of this funding went to the GNWT Cost of Living Subsidy, implemented in response to the electricity rate increases approved through the recent General Rate Application for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation. This subsidy restricts the bill increase to customers to a maximum of 15% from 2023-24 costs. The total value of this program is anticipated to be up to \$30 million, between 2025-26 and 2027-28. This support is designed to limit rising electricity rates driven by inflation, energy price volatility, as well as higher project cost overruns on some projects.
  - \$18 million has been directed to support the Sunk Cost Deferral Account as per direction issued by the Public Utilities Board; and
  - \$30 million will support the establishment of a temporary/short-term cost of living subsidy to ease electricity cost increases effective February 1, 2026 to March 31, 2028.

## Taxation

In collaboration with the Department of Finance, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs supports the delivery of property tax relief under the Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons Property Tax Relief Act. This exemption-based program reduces ongoing housing costs for eligible residents, helping seniors and persons with disabilities age safely and independently in their homes and communities while easing the overall cost of living.

As well, the GNWT continues to advocate to the federal government that the Northern Residents Deductions be indexed to the Canadian Consumer Price Index.

## Internet Costs

The GNWT has made significant progress in advocating for more affordable telecommunications services to help address cost of living pressures in the NWT. In January 2025, the Canadian Radiotelevision and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC, announced the creation of a new universal retail internet subsidy for the North. This followed sustained GNWT participation in CRTC proceedings and advocacy for more equitable internet pricing.

This subsidy is intended to reduce the gap between northern and southern internet costs and will help lower monthly household expenses while supporting access to essential online services, education, and economic opportunities. The GNWT continues to engage with the CRTC on implementation details such as eligibility, subsidy amounts, and how the subsidy will be delivered to ensure the program meets the needs of NWT residents.

## The GNWT Approach to Energy and Climate Change

The GNWT is developing a new approach to energy and climate change, focusing on addressing NWT's electricity infrastructure deficit, affordability, and reliability. Policy direction to the NWT Public Utilities Board expands net metering to businesses, giving them more ability to generate their own electricity. The Public Utilities Board is also leading integrated power system planning with the utilities, to ensure that electricity demand can be met affordably, reliably, and sustainably through 2050.

The public Board of Directors, recently appointed to NTPC, was given clear instructions to tackle the infrastructure deficit and improve affordability and reliability. The GNWT is working with Indigenous governments to advance energy projects like hydropower and transmission lines, aiming to stabilize costs and strengthen system reliability.

The GNWT leverages intergovernmental relationships to address cost of living pressures through federal engagement on key priorities, as well as initiatives to attract investment. These efforts focus on securing strategic investments, such as infrastructure and telecommunications projects, that drive economic development, support supply chain movement and redundancy, enhance service delivery, and reduce costs for residents.

This information is available in public communications, news releases, and on the GNWT website.