

**GNWT Response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations
Committee Report 4-16(5) on the
Review of the 2008-2009 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner**

Committee Recommendation 1:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Minister Responsible for Official Languages improve communications with the Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board and the Official Languages Board, or any future languages boards or committees; and provide written confirmation to the Boards and to the Standing Committee of departmental follow-through on the Boards' Recommendations.

GNWT Response:

- The Department is committed to continuing to improve communications with the two Languages Boards on issues related to their mandate or on matters raised by them at their duly convened meetings.
- Department communications are directed to the Chairs of both Languages Boards on matters related to their respective mandates. Such correspondence is then usually discussed at subsequent Languages Board meetings, at the discretion of the Chairs.
- The Department will ensure that both the Standing Committee on Government Operations and the two Languages Boards receive written confirmation of any developments as regards follow-up on recommendations by the Languages Boards.

Committee Recommendation 2:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Minister Responsible for Official Languages provide support to the Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board and the Official Languages Board, or any future languages boards or committees, in regard to their roles and responsibilities and in dealing with issues internal to the Boards, such as attendance and quorum.

GNWT Response:

- The Department will continue to provide administrative and other related support to the two Languages Boards during their term of office.
- Newly appointed Board Members attend a governance workshop focusing on their roles and responsibilities. The workshop also serves as an opportunity for them to identify some key issues that will help in accomplishing their respective mandates.

- Matters such as Board attendance and quorum are internal to the Languages Boards as per the Boards' joint Terms of Reference developed and approved by members of both Boards in April 2006. The Department will discuss issues around attendance and quorum to determine if these are actions that can be taken to facilitate attendance and quorum.

Committee Recommendation 3:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories continue to move forward with the concept of a service-based model as suggested by the development of the proposed Official Languages Services Act.

GNWT Response:

- The Department will move forward with a service-model concept as per the proposed Official Languages Services Act and in line with Standing Committee on Government Operations recommendation in its 2009 review of the *Official Languages Act*.

Committee Recommendation 4:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a formal, separate response to Speaking of Health: Official Languages as part of Quality Health Care in the Northwest Territories, and that it also provide this response to the Languages Commissioner as soon as possible.

GNWT Response:

- The GNWT has provided a separate response to the Languages Commissioner's January 2008 Report: Speaking of Health: Official languages as part of Quality Health Care in the Northwest Territories. A copy of this response was sent to the Office of the Languages Commissioner

Committee Recommendation 5:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a comprehensive response to this report within 120 days.

GNWT Response:

- The Government is committed to responding to Standing Committee recommendations in a timely manner.

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GNWT Response:

The following response was prepared by the Department of Health & Social Services (Department):

1. ***That interpretation services in all official languages of the Northwest Territories be available throughout the health care system in the Northwest Territories.***

Upon request, interpretation services are provided by the health and social services system. For example, the Department of Health and Social Services provides a range of services to the public such as marriage and other certificates as well as health care cards.

Services to the public are also offered in official languages by the Health and Social Services Authorities.

Except for Stanton Territorial Health Authority (STHA), interpretation services are offered for French, and the aboriginal language(s) of the region. These services are offered using either interpreter, or at times using a phone service called CanTalk. STHA offers services in all eleven NWT official languages, as well as a number of other languages.

The existing Guidelines of the *Official Languages Act* recognize three levels of service:

- a. Direct Service: A bilingual employee provides a service in the Official Language preferred by the client (e.g. Community Health Representative in Resolution speaking Chipewyan).

- b. Facilitation Service: An employee assists to provide the service in another official language (e.g. a French speaking clerk helps admitting a client at Public Health).
- c. Interpretation Service: A trained interpreter assists an English speaking provider in the delivery of a service.

2. *That the Government of the Northwest Territories take all necessary steps to ensure the timely translation of health material in all official languages. This may necessitate the need for in-house Aboriginal language translation services or dedicated contractors for those services.*

The Department recognizes that timely translation of public material could be improved. The timely translation of documents has remained a challenge largely because of the scarcity of aboriginal languages interpreter /translators (I/Ts). Contracted services or in house would not address this challenge. The Department has at time use the services of Community Health Representatives when I/Ts are unavailable.

Furthermore, the lack of standardized terminology in many Official Aboriginal languages continues to cause translation difficulties as many translations are completed in a dialect that may not be suitable to some aboriginal language speakers.

The Department of Health and Social Services looks forward to continuing to work with the Department of Education Culture and Employment on I/Ts availability and standardization issues. Translation into French has been significantly easier because of the cohort of professionally trained translators on staff at the Department of ECE.

3. *That the Government of the Northwest Territories take steps to ensure that health information is available in all 11 official languages, both online and in hard copy, and throughout the Government of the Northwest Territories. These materials should include:*

- a. *General contact information for resources;*
- b. *General health information; and*
- c. *Extensive information to assist individuals in achieving a healthy lifestyle.*

The Department is currently posting e-versions to its public site, and printing hard copies based on need and requests. While our multilingual site contains basic information in all eleven official languages, the site contains a range of material in the Official Aboriginal Languages and in French. Increasingly, the Department is using audio podcasts in addition to printed materials. There are various criteria for determining which documents to translate into which aboriginal official languages. For example, material on the STI has been translated into most NWT Official languages while an annual report on the HSS system will be translated into French unless there is a specific demand criteria are met.

4. That the Department of Health and Social Services conduct a survey to determine client satisfaction with languages services when using Telecare-NWT.

The Department undertakes regular evaluation of NWT Healthline (formerly Telecare-NWT). The evaluation tracks calls by language of service, and quality of service received. Eighty two percent of clients were very satisfied and ten percent were satisfied with the quality of service received. One percent of clients identified as French speaking.

5. That the Government of the Northwest Territories create a directory that highlights the language proficiencies of health care professionals in the Northwest Territories.

The Department recognizes that the development of a directory would be a valuable tool; consideration is being given on how such a directory would be developed and maintained.

Currently, if a member of the public asks for health or social services in an Official Language, other than English, the service is provided according to accepted standards of practice. Specifically, service is provided in accordance with existing Guidelines of the *Official Languages Act*: direct, facilitated, or interpreted service.

6. That the Government of the Northwest Territories immediately implement a plan for the training and certification of interpreters/translators, with special training being available in medical terminology.

The development of a system-wide plan to implement the recommendation is complicated by factors including the issue of standardized terminology in the Aboriginal languages. The Department would support collaborating with the Department of Education Culture and Employment in the advancement of training and certification of I/T.

7. That the Government of the Northwest Territories take immediate steps to develop a medical terminology dictionary in all Aboriginal Official Languages.

STHA currently has "A Handbook for Medical Interpreters in Inuktitut, Tłıchǫ, French and North Slavey. There are six other Official Languages awaiting production. Based on volume of requests for interpretation, the new translations of this resource are being completed in the following order: South Slavey, Inuinnaqtun, Chipewyan, Inuvialuktun, Cree, and Gwich'in. The Department will continue to work with language groups who receive funding for language development if they identify this as a priority for their funding.

8. That a formal process be developed wherein each official language group in a designated area will have direct input to the regional administration of the health authority of that region.

Representation on Health and Social Services Authorities' Boards of Management is inclusive. The Minister is required by legislation to ensure that the Board Members appointed will adequately represent the communities the Authority serves. Members may represent individual communities or specific stakeholders such as Aboriginal or municipal organizations.

In order to ensure adequate representation, the Minister seeks nominations from the Band Councils, municipal governments, Métis and Aboriginal organizations and from the general public to ensure that residents' health and social services needs are met and that their cultural and language requirements are respected.

9. That health care practitioners who come to the Northwest Territories be provided with a basic orientation on cultural and language considerations in the Northwest Territories.

The Department recognizes the importance of culturally appropriate services as such the "Different Way of Living" DVD is offered as a resource for new staff. This is in addition to the orientation resources available on the recruitment and retention website www.practicenorth.ca.

10. That the Government of the Northwest Territories continue to work towards an Integrated Service Delivery Model for health care throughout the Northwest Territories and that interpreters/translators who speak the Official Languages of a designated area be employed by health authorities in that area as part of that Integrated Service Delivery Model.

The Department recognizes the importance of having services and programs being offered in the appropriate language and respecting cultural values. Currently a number of HSSAs already have IT on staff. The Department will continue to work with ECE to clarify certification standards, and with HSS Authorities to ensure quality interpretation services.

11. That the Government of the Northwest Territories increase the use of Telecare, Telehealth and other technologies to provide interpretation services in all official languages in all health care settings throughout the Northwest Territories.

Healthline (formerly Telecare) offers 24/7 access to a certified nurse in all 11 Official Languages. Another available technology is CanTalk, a paid dial-in interpreter service.

More strategic use of CanTalk as well as the Telehealth video-conferencing system could create stronger links among NWT and southern communities for:

- patients and practitioners
- students and mentors
- bilingual staff and peers
- staff wishing to improve language skills.

12. *That the Government of the Northwest Territories establish a pilot project community health centre in Yellowknife to service the Francophone population.*

Specifics of the project would include:

- a. The Francophone community would be directly involved in the administration of the community health centre.
- b. The working language of the community health centre would be French.
- c. The facility would collaborate extensively with the Alberta Health Network so that all services could be accessed in French. This would likely involve a heavy reliance on Telehealth technology.
- d. The facility would be evaluated after a full year of operation and the review would involve input from patients who accessed the facility over the course of the year.

A consolidated primary clinic is being developed in Yellowknife. Services will continue to be available in French and other OLS of the populations served by YHSSA. There are no plans for a stand-alone French language medical clinic. The consolidation of all bilingual staff in one clinic / two sites will increase the likelihood that a francophone resident of the YHSSA will be served in French compared to the current distribution of bilingual staff among numerous clinics. The intent is to ensure French language clients can be served in the language of their choice upon request.

13. *That the Government of the Northwest Territories continue to promote and develop programs that teach Aboriginal languages and develop a strategy to create youth who are competent in an Aboriginal language.*

The Department will continue to support ECE on their efforts to promote and develop Aboriginal language speaking Youth. In the past, HSS has contributed financially to the creation of educational resources about health and social services topics in various Official Languages through the Aboriginal Terminology Development Fund which ends this fiscal year.

14. *That the Government of the Northwest Territories devise programs that encourage Aboriginal youth and Francophone youth to enter careers in the health professions and to return to the Northwest Territories to work.*

DHSS is working with Human Resources on recruitment of bilingual (English / French) health professionals. There is currently no targeted recruitment of Official Aboriginal languages-speaking employees.

The Department agrees that including information on the Practice North site about translation and interpretation professions and aboriginal language capacity should be considered for the future.

15. *That the Government of the Northwest Territories develop strong incentive programs to encourage those who speak an Aboriginal Official Language or French to work in the North and to encourage their retention.*

The Department will work towards utilizing Feel Good Gazette, SharePoint, messenger other strategies to promote and encourage employees who speak more than one Official Language. Consideration will also be given to maintaining a list - of bilingual bonus recipients, posted as PDF on the staff SharePoint site, used by all HSSAs and DHSS.

NOTE: A copy of this response will be sent to the Office of the Languages Commissioner of the NWT.