

THE HONOURABLE GLEN ABERNETHY
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND
SOCIAL SERVICES

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Anti-Poverty

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has made a commitment in its mandate to work collaboratively to reduce poverty in the NWT by working with our partners to advance the Territorial Anti-Poverty Action Plan, funding community-based partners, supporting community priorities for wellness and developing additional options for action.

Poverty is a complex issue and there is no single solution. The lack of a commonly accepted, shared definition on poverty makes it difficult to have a focused discussion among stakeholders. Because poverty and the factors that influence poverty are so all-encompassing, it makes it difficult to set parameters or put a box around the appropriate scope for a poverty reduction strategy.

However, our work in this area is guided by a territorial framework that was developed by the Government of the Northwest Territories in partnership with other stakeholders, including non-government organizations, Aboriginal governments and business. The framework outlines five areas where we need to take action – including supporting children and families, promoting healthy living, ensuring safe and affordable housing, making our communities sustainable and providing an integrated continuum of services to our residents.

The Framework is supported by a Territorial Anti-Poverty Action Plan, which was also developed in collaboration with our stakeholders. This Plan is rooted in the fundamental premise that the reduction and elimination of poverty requires sustained effort by all levels of government and civil society. The Government of the Northwest Territories has a leadership role, but we can't do it alone.

Importantly, Mr. Speaker, we can't do it without our communities. We've learned that with our limited resources, the most effective approach is to follow the lead of local champions and provide resources to support local initiatives. As Minister, I have been impressed by the amazing proposals with tangible, achievable results generated in our smallest and most remote communities and am pleased to support them.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that holding annual Anti-Poverty Round Tables alone will not eliminate poverty in the Northwest Territories. But these round tables provide an excellent opportunity for partners to discuss challenges and successes in each region, to share best practices, and to advise our government on priority areas for action.

In a similar vein, the Anti-Poverty Fund is not designed to solve poverty in the Northwest Territories on its own. Rather, it is intended to support local initiatives, tailored to respond to locally identified needs and priorities, and hopefully to assist community and non-government organizations to leverage other funding for these important initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, to get the complete picture of how much our government is spending to fight poverty, one needs to step back and take a broader look at the investments we are making in the NWT's people. The GNWT is proposing to spend nearly \$1.7 billion in its 2017-2018 budget, Mr. Speaker, with a billion of that – 63 percent intended for departments in the Social Envelope. We talk a lot about new investments at budget time, but we shouldn't forget the ongoing spending those new investments are being added to. Some of that ongoing spending includes:

- \$151 million for schools, including \$25 million for inclusive schooling;

- \$48.8 million for income security, including \$33.9 million for income assistance and \$14.7 million for student financial assistance;
- \$158 million for community health programs, including \$68 million for community clinics and health centres, \$16.5 million for mental health and addictions, and almost \$8 million for homecare;
- \$27.5 million for community social programs intended to protect and support children and encourage strong, healthy families;
- \$33.5 million for supplementary health programs, including \$23 million for medical travel;
- \$56 million for community housing services that support the operation of subsidized public and affordable housing units; and
- \$7 million in homeowner programs like PATH, CARE and SAFE.

New investments in the proposed Main Estimates which will have a significant impact on poverty in our communities include:

- \$750,000 to provide services to homeless people in Yellowknife,
- a commitment to fully fund junior kindergarten, which will reduce child care costs for many parents,
- \$3 million to enhance the Small Community Employment Support program,
- \$750,000 to extend the NWT Child Benefit
- \$500,000 to provide a home repair program to low-income seniors.

The Government of the Northwest has a unique leadership role in reducing and eliminating poverty, Mr. Speaker, because it provides health, social services, education, housing and economic development to all NWT residents. However, to effectively reduce and eliminate poverty, we must continue to have a multi-faceted approach and a sustained effort provided by all levels of government – from federal to municipal – and community partners. We will continue to work with our partners to advance the Action Plan and support communities' priorities for wellness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.