



EMERGING STRONGER

PLANNING THE NWT'S SOCIAL AND
ECONOMIC RECOVERY TOGETHER





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A Message from the Premier of the NWT





The COVID-19 pandemic is changing fundamental assumptions about how we live, work and do business in the Northwest Territories (NWT), across Canada and around the world. The events we have witnessed and experienced since the pandemic was declared are unprecedented, and the past year has challenged us on all levels. We have learned a lot in managing a public health crisis of this magnitude and our early actions are paying off. The pandemic has put us to the test, but we continue to demonstrate resilience and commitment to our communities, businesses, and residents.

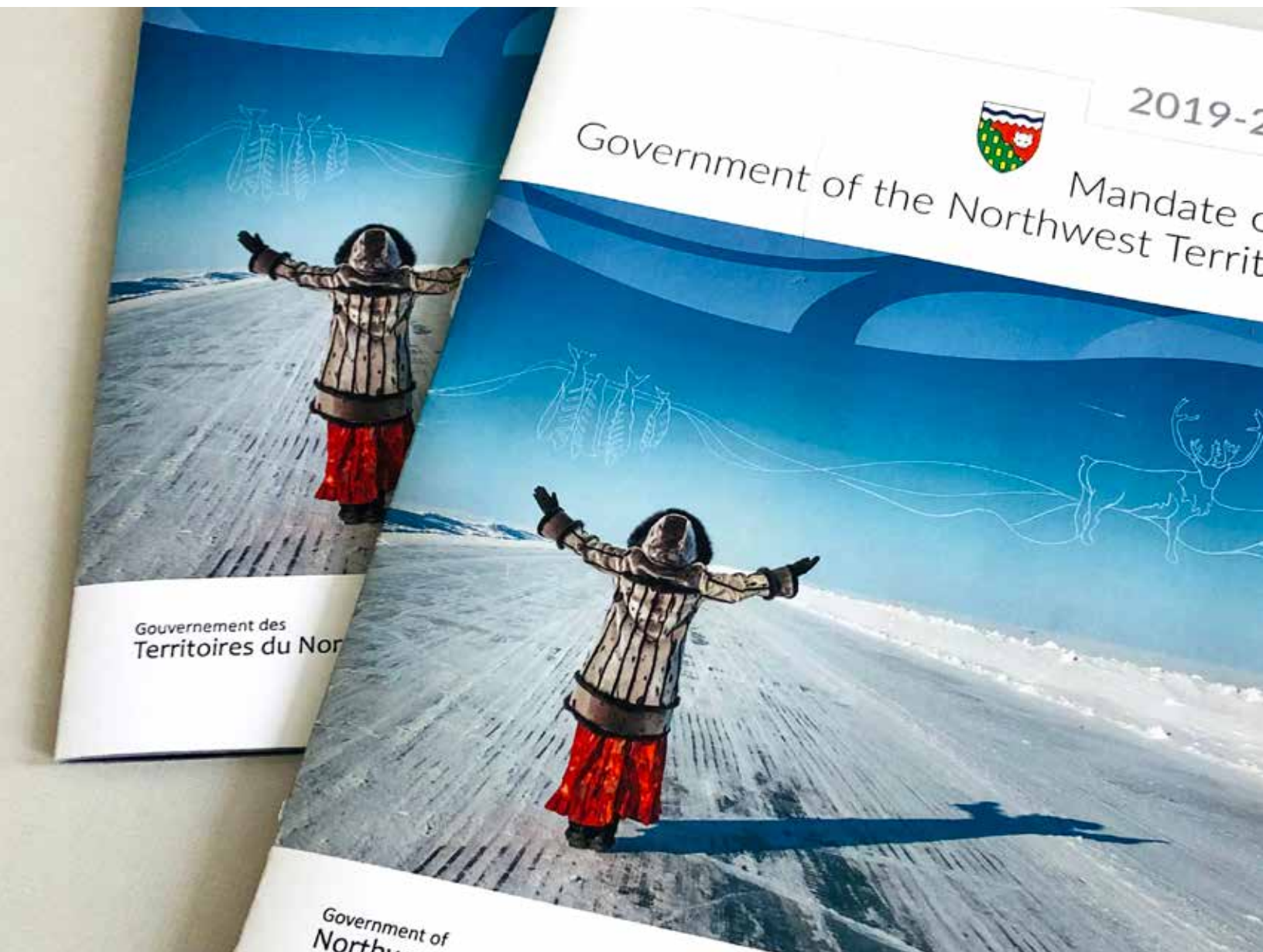
Shortly before the pandemic, the *Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories 2019-2023* was tabled. The *Mandate* sets out the priorities agreed to by all Members of the Legislative Assembly, and many of the actions we identified will help us build our economy, support communities and people and recover from the impacts of the pandemic. The pandemic has exposed economic and social gaps in our society and has increased the urgency to address these issues. Emerging Stronger complements our *Mandate* by highlighting areas of responsiveness and areas for further growth, and I encourage you to refer to the *Mandate* as you review this plan.

Our success depends on partnership with all levels of government and working closely with all stakeholders. The support of Indigenous and municipal governments, residents and businesses has kept the people of the NWT largely safe from the waves of the virus that continue to affect other parts of the country and the world. To date, we are fortunate to have avoided the severity of impact experienced elsewhere. At the same time, we know that some areas of our economy have been particularly hard hit, and that many residents have been suffering.

As we have responded to the pandemic, residents, communities, and businesses have been very open in identifying the impacts and actions most needed to position ourselves to seize the opportunities that the post pandemic expansion will offer and this document captures what we have heard. By working closely with stakeholders to implement our *Mandate* and the Emerging Stronger Plan, we have the opportunity to position the NWT to thrive.

Caroline Cochrane

Introduction: Foundations of Recovery





The COVID-19 global pandemic is ongoing and the NWT's response and recovery depends on multiple factors that are beyond our direct control. *Emerging Stronger* sets the direction for the NWT's economic and social recovery. The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has an opportunity to apply initial lessons learned over the course of the past year to navigate the evolving global situation and build on existing priorities to establish a solid foundation for recovery and longer-term growth.

In late 2019, all members of the 19th Legislative Assembly identified economic and social priorities that form the basis of the *Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories 2019-2023 (the Mandate)*. The pandemic made these priorities even more apparent and urgent and meaningful progress on *Mandate* commitments will help the NWT through the pandemic and build back better. The *Mandate* identifies actions underway to **create jobs, strengthen and diversify the economy, build wellness, strength and resilience, and increase government efficiency and responsiveness**. Public reporting on the progress to implement the mandate occurs annually in February/March. *Emerging Stronger* highlights actions to be undertaken in addition to the work identified within the *Mandate* and should be understood in this context.

Many lessons can be drawn from the past several months, but a number of key themes have emerged. A more comprehensive process is needed to identify key lessons learned to better inform future regulatory, funding, policy and program decisions once the pandemic has run its course and the extent of its impacts become clear. This document focuses on important lessons learned from the GNWT's response to the pandemic to date, and immediate actions the GNWT will take to set a clear course for recovery. *Mandate* commitments where work is already underway are also reflected.

This document also highlights immediate actions the GNWT took at the start of the pandemic to respond to the crisis the pandemic posed (Appendix A), as well as an overview of the initial economic and social impacts of COVID-19 on residents and businesses in the NWT (Appendix B). A plan with targets and timelines for the actions discussed in this document is also attached (Appendix C). A report on the achievement of *Mandate* commitments is produced annually, and the actions in this Plan will be added to that reporting so that linkages can be made between activities in the *Mandate* and this plan.

The pandemic continues to pose numerous, complex challenges for all of us. As national and international public health circumstances change, the GNWT anticipates that the conversation around social and economic recovery will be ongoing and evolve through dialogue with the public and with Indigenous, community, non-governmental and industry partners.



Initial Lessons Learned

The pandemic is an ongoing global public health crisis. The next 18 months are anticipated to be a time of transition and ongoing uncertainty. The timing of public health measures being eased in the NWT depends on infection rates, control of COVID-19 variants of concern and vaccination rates both in the NWT and across Canada. The GNWT must be able to continue to quickly respond to a dynamic public health environment while being mindful of the economy and reduced government revenues. While a more thorough analysis is needed to identify and expand on lessons learned to inform the work of government once the pandemic has reached a later stage and the extent of its impacts are better understood, we can draw some important lessons from the GNWT's response to the pandemic to date.

The lessons identified in this section are related to long-standing challenges faced by the NWT. The pandemic highlighted these issues, and the need for decisive action. The actions identified in this document build on the *Mandate*, and should be considered alongside that document. These initial lessons will inform the GNWT's work on the *Mandate*, and the way we undertake core business.

It is difficult to predict the long-term economic impacts of the pandemic, but the actions we take now will position the GNWT to effectively implement sustainable policies, complete key infrastructure projects, diversify the economy and build stronger partnerships.

Continue to adapt and respond to challenges in an efficient, coordinated and evidence-based way

The response to the pandemic demonstrated the GNWT's ability to act quickly and decisively. The pandemic presented a call to action by all levels of government, and the resulting supports established were targeted to address specific issues quickly, while acknowledging that further response would be needed and new needs would arise. The GNWT needs to continue to adapt and respond quickly, efficiently and in a coordinated way when serving residents. Many of the challenges highlighted during the pandemic, including a lack of suitable housing and shelters, should not be the accepted norm, but be addressed as the emergencies they are.

Like many governments across Canada and around the world, the GNWT is spending a large amount of money on pandemic response while it continues to experience declining revenues. The GNWT is also heavily reliant on federal funding. Prior to the pandemic, the NWT economy was already in decline. Should these pre-existing trends continue, residents will experience the impacts of significantly less government funding on programs and services in the next five to ten years.

Using the crisis caused by the pandemic, the GNWT will:

- Build a better foundation for more responsible fiscal policy. The GNWT has started a Government Renewal exercise to align public funding with priorities to achieve the best results for residents and promote efficiency within government. Any future new initiatives will be subject to performance measurement and public reporting, and work is being undertaken to develop tracking and reporting for existing programs.
- Report quarterly on a range of social and economic indicators including child maltreatment and neglect, mental health and addictions, alcohol related harms, family violence, and employment rate.
- Improve data collection and reporting to better inform decision-making and program delivery, and provide information to residents on the performance of government programs.

Build stronger partnerships with Indigenous governments and organizations, community governments and the non-profit and charitable sector

The pandemic demonstrated how vital community partners are in the delivery of childcare, early childhood education, disability and long-term care; on the land programs, and emergency response. It also highlighted the importance of long-term care, elder care, disability care and other areas that comprise the care economy, and the opportunity to strengthen partnerships to better address needs. Most organizations experience significant capacity challenges. Many programs and supports have limited reach within the NWT's smaller and remote communities. Organizations offering similar services often compete for limited sources of funding.

In addition to actions identified in the Mandate, the GNWT will:

- Establish an external advisory table to focus on strengthening the role and capacity of the not-for-profit sector, and focusing and expanding the caring economy.
- Continue direct engagement with Indigenous governments, including through a multilateral table to ensure greater collaboration among the GNWT and Indigenous government leadership.

Mandate commitments supporting these actions

Review, update, and publish territorial principles and interests to reflect the GNWT's new priorities and *Mandate*.

Improve accountability and oversight for Indigenous Reconciliation.

Identify, prioritize, and strengthen key actions to further implement UNDRIP.

Amend existing delegations of authority to empower regional and community staff, and provide training to ensure staff are aware of their decision-making authority.

Partner with and support Indigenous governments and community stakeholders in the delivery of culturally respectful, community-based mental health and addictions programs.

Implement a program that provides non-government organizations with funding for facility repairs, to address code issues, and to undertake retrofits to support new childcare spaces.

Initial Lessons Learned continued

Advance emergency response work based on lessons learned from initial stages of pandemic

There was a rapid deployment of sheltering and service supports in the early stage of the pandemic designed to protect homeless or street involved individuals who were particularly vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19. These services occurred in partnership with community organizations and demonstrated the potential that exists for deepening partnerships and building emergency response capacity with and within the community sector going forward.

In addition to actions identified in the Mandate, the GNWT will:

- Conduct after-action reviews and other system improvement initiatives, including for the COVID-19 Incident Management Team.
- Work with community governments to update Community Emergency Plans and provide Pandemic Specific Hazard Plan and Essential Service Plan templates to ensure inclusion of emergency sheltering and pandemic response needs.
- Improve and expand existing emergency response training to municipal governments to include Emergency Planning Workshops and tabletop exercises based on identified community risks, and an online webinar tutorial on updating Community Emergency Plans.

Mandate commitments supporting these actions

Increase GNWT funding to municipal governments.

Refine funding model to ensure continued fairness and transparency.

Provide communities new opportunities to raise additional revenue and reduce or stabilize the cost of delivering core programs and services.



Further efforts to support broadband infrastructure for fast and reliable internet services across the NWT

The pandemic demonstrated that access to quality, affordable internet and devices is critical to success in health and social services, education and in business. The internet is a critical means to communicate key information to residents during the pandemic. For a period of time, the majority of the GNWT's and other governments' workforce transitioned to working remotely, which, for the most part, allowed program and service delivery to continue. However, remote working environments confirmed the wide gaps that exist in digital connectivity throughout the NWT. Schools and Aurora College continue to struggle with bandwidth capacity and access to efficient internet for distance and blended learning. Lack of technology at home for student use, especially for lower income households, creates barriers to learning and training. Limited broadband also impedes innovation for online business and entrepreneurship.

Existing efforts to bridge the digital divide must advance in order to support a sustainable, long-term recovery. It must be recognized that technology is now integral to how the GNWT and residents do business, and reliability and accessibility must be established for all communities.

In addition to actions identified in the Mandate, the GNWT will:

- Continue to press for federal policy changes to ensure applications for investment recognize the NWT's challenges.
- Urge the CRTC to take action to regulate rates for internet services in satellite communities; provide ongoing portable subsidies to lower rates for residential and business internet services; review the terms and conditions of wholesale access by competing service providers; and make network improvements to enhance reliability.

Mandate commitments supporting these actions

Complete Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk fibre link.

Advance work to support fast and reliable broadband internet services in all NWT communities.



*Initial Lessons Learned continued***Meet the needs of vulnerable populations**

The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on residents' ability to meet basic needs, as indicated by the increased client uptake in Income Assistance (IA) during the first months of the pandemic.

The GNWT opened shelters in Fort Simpson and Hay River. To support housing affordability during this period, the Transitional Rent Supplement Program ran until March 30, 2021. Mitigation of homelessness was identified as a priority and the budget for the Homelessness Assistance Fund was increased to improve housing stability for residents facing eviction or requiring housing. Funding was increased to expedite critical repairs needed to 108 vacant units in small communities. The majority of these units have been repaired and allocated under regular programming.

The pandemic pushed the GNWT to move more quickly in the direction of harm reduction as it relates to addictions, particularly in the homeless population. The GNWT worked with non-governmental organization partners to distribute alcohol in cases where it was needed. While the GNWT was already working towards the implementation of a formal Managed Alcohol Program (MAP), this controlled distribution of alcohol to individuals in isolation has provided a great deal of information, data and lessons learned which are being used to inform an NWT MAP approach.

In addition to actions identified in the Mandate, the GNWT will:

- Improve the existing IA program to ensure the types and levels of benefits, and income exemptions, are meeting the basic needs of NWT residents.
- Advance work on integrated service delivery by developing the framework to support change within our systems, and exploring practical demonstration opportunities to improve timely and effective access to programs.
- Use key, NWT-specific information to create an NWT approach to managed alcohol and accelerate work on the Alcohol Strategy and review the regulatory changes introduced during the pandemic.
- Work with partners to address longer-term funding needs required to address gaps identified during the pandemic.
- Undertake a review of Northwest Territories Housing Corporation policies.

Mandate commitments supporting these actions

Improve services for individuals with addictions to reduce number of returns to treatment and increase length of time between treatments.

Conduct an international jurisdictional review of service delivery for isolated and remote communities.

Create a separate income assistance program tailored to seniors and persons with disabilities.

Increase community-based peer support programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Wellbriety.

Establish medical detox and managed alcohol programming.

Provide standardized screening and assessment tools, incorporating more traditional healing approaches.

Increase support and counseling training opportunities for staff.

Work with partners, including the federal and Indigenous governments, to increase funding for housing programs.

Improve services and expand equitable access to care for all Northerners

The pandemic required a different approach to mental wellness and addictions recovery service delivery. Programs such as community-based counseling supports that previously had only been available in person or over the phone moved to virtual care. Due to the pandemic, the system is now better prepared to support virtual care options. While services have since reverted to mainly face-to-face delivery, the change toward virtual care will be lasting. The inclusion of the e-mental health services has shown itself to be more relevant in the pandemic when people could not come together face to face. The option to meet with clients virtually may mean less disruption to services going forward.

In addition to the actions identified in the Mandate, the GNWT will:

- Plan and implement a new Electronic Medical Record system, including scoping options for improving the ability of patients to access information from their health record and providers.
- Accelerate development of a plan to sustain virtual care solutions rapidly developed in response to the pandemic, including improved phone and video-based consultation and e-prescribing.

Mandate commitments supporting these actions

Increase the availability of e-health, on the land, and other proven approaches to mental wellness and addictions recovery.

Reduce the number of vacancies and the reliance on locums.

Increase the number of resident health care professionals by at least 20 percent.

Implement comprehensive labour force planning for health human resources.

Reduce wait times for access.



*Initial Lessons Learned continued***Provide accessible, quality education and training**

Early learning and child care and JK-12 education fill an important role in ensuring parents are able to work, in providing students access to mental health and counseling services, food programs and safe places, and in supporting the general well-being of children and families through access to early learning and child care programs, school and routines.

The immediate and unplanned closure of schools and decision by some early learning and child care programs to stop operating at the outset of the pandemic childcare emphasized the essential social supports offered by licensed early learning and child care programs and JK-12 schools. It also reinforced the potential for expanded distance or blended delivery of post-secondary education programming at Aurora College and by other NWT post-secondary education providers. The pandemic highlighted the diversity and disparity among schools and communities with respect to access to the internet and digital devices, while some schools struggled to provide sufficient space to distance students appropriately for full-time in-person learning, resulting in blended learning options for some of the older grade levels.

The time and effort required to coordinate collective and consistent decision-making across all regions around school closures, reopening plans, and approaches to distance learning was immense and taxing on all levels of the school system, highlighting the need to improve and modernize the NWT education system through a review of the legislative framework and school funding formula.

In addition to the actions identified in the Mandate, the GNWT will:

- Continue to provide post-secondary students with increased funding in the 2021-22 academic year to assist with additional costs associated with online learning.
- Review the Student Financial Assistance program to ensure benefits are supporting students to achieve their post-secondary goals, with a special focus on removing barriers to post-secondary participation for Indigenous students, with changes to be implemented by the beginning of the 2023-24 academic year.
- Starting in the upcoming academic year, increase access to post-secondary education opportunities at Aurora College, including through the continued expansion of online course offerings.
- Starting in the 2022-23 academic year, expand and enhance Aurora College's teaching and research facilities across the NWT.
- Provide more diverse post-secondary education opportunities for residents, including increased access to learning in every community, ladder programming from literacy to upgrading to certificate to degree, through the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university,
- Continue to defer or make optional large scale student assessments such as Diploma Exams and Alberta Achievement Exams for JK-12 students.
- Continue to provide supports to Education Bodies and schools for online, remote or blended learning, including internet access and devices like Chromebooks and Turbosticks, upon request.

Mandate commitments supporting these actions

Transform Aurora College into an accredited and independent polytechnic university over the next six years.

Work with Indigenous governments, community governments, families, and partners to identify and begin to address the impediments to student success and promote the value of education.

Modernize the Education Act and review education funding framework.

Ensure distance learning opportunities are available in all NWT communities.

Implement a pilot program to support training for classroom assistants.

Implement new programming to assist schools and parents when making decisions about student placement, promotion to the next grade, or retention.

Ensure better coordinated services for children and their families.

Increase availability and reduce the costs of childcare in communities.

Better support and integrate work-force development within infrastructure projects

The NWT relies heavily on an out-of-territory workforce, and industry and business continue to be disrupted by pandemic travel restrictions. The GNWT has the opportunity to support NWT workforce development through its infrastructure investments.

In addition to the actions identified in the Mandate, the GNWT will:

- Work with Indigenous governments, communities and businesses to improve training investments and career pathways.
- Provide regional based Career and Education Advisor supports to all grade 9-12 students beginning in the 2021-22 school year to assist students in post-secondary decision-making and planning.
- Invest in apprenticeships through the NWT Housing Corporation and the Department of Infrastructure.

Mandate commitments supporting these actions

Create a Working Group to review existing employment opportunities and develop new programs that prepare NWT residents from small communities for job opportunities.

The NWT Housing Corporation will leverage opportunities that encourage residents of small communities to learn a trade.

Establish collaborative partnerships with Indigenous governments.

Transform Aurora College into an accredited and independent polytechnic university over the next six years.

Ensure that GNWT capital planning supports equitable opportunities throughout the territory, and a greener more climate resilient territory

The GNWT makes substantial capital investments each year and is advancing major infrastructure projects. There is increased public interest and federal priority placed on green energy, climate change mitigation and adaptation actions and ensuring a more environmentally responsible approach as part of the pandemic recovery. Contract opportunities could be better distributed to create more equitable levels of activity across regions and stimulate the economy.

In addition to the actions identified in the Mandate, the GNWT will:

- Accelerate the review of GNWT procurement policies including the *Business Incentive Policy* and the *Negotiated Contract Policy*, and consider the development of an Indigenous procurement policy.
- Invite Indigenous governments and businesses to be involved as equity partners in key strategic investments as projects develop.

Mandate commitments supporting these actions

Integrate climate change considerations and improve accountability in GNWT decision-making processes.

Reduce reliance on diesel generation.

Increase opportunities for equity participation with local and Indigenous governments in economic development projects.

Target energy conservation and efficiency initiatives to those most in need in partnership with key stakeholders, including the Arctic Energy Alliance and Northwest Territories Power Corporation.

*Initial Lessons Learned continued***Support the Hardest Hit Sectors**

Industries reliant on in-person customers and social contact, such as tourism, arts, entertainment and recreation, wholesale trade, accommodation, food services, and mining have experienced the steepest impacts of the pandemic. Tourism was the industry first hit by the pandemic when it began to surface in China in late 2019 and tourism and the associated hospitality industries may be the slowest to recover.

The GNWT has worked with NWT Tourism (NWTT) to develop a template for remote tourism operators to assist with obtaining Chief Public Health Officer approvals for remote tourism operations, along with assembling information on best practices on health and safety measures for remote tourism operators and will continue to support these sectors. In addition to this the GNWT has worked to provide and extend relief to businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector that exhausted existing federal relief programs.

In addition to these sectors the work of the mining sector in the NWT has been affected greatly by travel restrictions in particular. The GNWT is continuing to work closely with the members of the territorial mining sector who have been to mitigate these impacts.

In addition to the actions identified in the Mandate, the GNWT will:

- Seek to assist the tourism, aviation, construction, hospitality and the mining sectors to position for survival and eventual rebound.
- Work with NWTT to reestablish positive public sentiment towards travellers entering communities with a strategy to be shared in 2021.
- Invest, through NWTT, on marketing to Canadian domestic travellers and support businesses to compete for domestic and eventually international tourists once NWT borders are set to re-open.
- Work with NWTT, operators, and businesses as appropriate to provide clear communication on public health criteria, including infection rates, control of COVID-19 variants of concern and vaccination rates, that will drive changes in travel restrictions and allow tourism operators to position themselves for rebound and to further open up.
- Provide mineral exploration prospectors and companies that are unable to work their mineral claims with the ability to extend their tenure via the Work Credit Program.

Mandate commitments supporting these actions

Increase tourism in the NWT with a focus on increasing tourism outside Yellowknife.

Work with Indigenous and community governments to develop regional, tourism-based promotional campaigns.

Support the development of local capacity and tourism infrastructure and programs across the NWT.

Attract and support both early-stage and advanced exploration projects.



Better support businesses

The pandemic highlighted the need to better connect business to support programs as they become available, and remove regulatory burdens to encourage entrepreneurship. NWT residents have demonstrated a willingness to support local and independent businesses that offer the goods and services residents want to buy. As economic restrictions have eased during the pandemic, retail sales and other service industries have been able to rebound more quickly than those relying on diamond mining or visiting tourists.

In addition to the actions identified in the Mandate, the GNWT will:

- Better align business support programs, and further examine existing roles, resources and support, starting with a business development workshop with lending partners.
- Examine existing contribution programs to ensure priority on northern benefit and investment.
- Accelerate the work underway to reduce red tape.
- Enhance Business Development and Investment Corporation financial programs and expand investment options in response to changing needs of NWT businesses while also advancing legislative amendments and improving operational processes.

Mandate commitments supporting these actions

Encourage entrepreneurship by reducing red tape and regulatory burdens on small businesses.

Establish a working group with the private sector that will provide policy and regulatory recommendations to eliminate unnecessary administrative burdens on small businesses.



*Initial Lessons Learned continued***Expand and diversify the economy**

The next two to twenty years will likely witness the closure of the existing diamond mines. Remediation activities associated with natural resource project closures, as well as commitments to remediate contaminated sites across the NWT will present regional employment opportunities. The GNWT is also supportive of other projects coming on stream, including new exploration projects across the NWT's diverse array of resource commodities that will stimulate regional economic activity. Nearly half of the NWT labour force is employed by the public sector, which acted as an economic stabilizer during the pandemic, but also emphasized the disparities between public and private sectors and further underscored the need for economic development and diversification.

In addition to the actions identified in the Mandate, the GNWT will:

- Work with Indigenous governments, development corporations, the mining industry and all regulatory partners to find ways to move proposed mine expansions and advanced projects into the production phase with community support.
- Work closely with the federal government and Indigenous governments and organizations to prioritize and implement remediation projects.
- Assess the potential for development of a 'remediation economy' within the NWT, while upholding the polluter pays principle and ensuring that operators remain fully responsible for closure and reclamation.
- Attract and facilitate grassroots prospecting and exploration in areas of high mineral potential.
- Work with the Conference Board of Canada to update the *NWT Labour Market Forecast and Needs Assessment* to the year 2035, including consideration of the mining and remediation, tourism, knowledge, housing and infrastructure economies.
- Renew and implement the *Skills 4 Success Action Plan (2021-2025)* to meet the demand and supply needs of the NWT labour market, with public engagement beginning April 2021 and completed by the end of 2021.
- Update and launch economic diversification strategies including the *Agriculture Strategy*, which includes a focus on small scale foods, the *NWT Arts Strategy* and the *NWT Film Strategy*.

**Mandate commitments supporting these actions**

Work with a broad range of partners to create a Knowledge Economy Action Plan.

Establish regional economic development plans to support growth in all sectors of the economy, including agriculture, fisheries, forestry, the knowledge economy, manufacturing, and arts.

Include tourism potential and community planning within regional economic plans.

Complete a review of the Mining Incentive Program and identify new ways to support advanced projects.

Conduct an independent review and develop recommendations to increase the success of objectives set out in socio-economic agreements.

In collaboration with Indigenous governments, develop and implement the Regional Mineral Strategies that promote investment and increase awareness of the NWT's regulatory system.

Increase food security through locally produced, harvested, and affordable food.

Attract and support both early-stage and advanced exploration projects.

Transform Aurora College into an accredited and independent polytechnic university over the next six years.



Next Steps

The full duration and impact of the pandemic remain unknown at this time. Any plan we put forward is our best assessment of the actions we can take based on our current circumstances. We must recognize the need to remain flexible and responsive to challenges and opportunities that are beyond our control and difficult to predict. As a result, this should be considered a living document that will be updated and reported on annually to reflect achievements.

As a government, the GNWT must be clear in communicating its progress on recovery efforts. The GNWT will provide information on our recovery, including data on economic and social indicators, and invite ideas for further actions to assist in building a stronger economy and social foundation. The GNWT will also engage earlier in budget dialogues than previous years so that residents, businesses, and community partners can provide input into ongoing planning. Our engagement will also include direct discussions with Indigenous governments, and community partners as we continue to build a stronger NWT for all.



Appendix A - Actions We've Taken to Respond to the Pandemic

While the pandemic is a health crisis, it is also an economic crisis. The impact the required public health response to the pandemic was hard on NWT businesses. In response, GNWT Departments and Agencies made significant efforts to understand and respond to the needs of the NWT residents and the business community. The GNWT worked closely with the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CANNOR), and lobbied the federal government for business and economic supports especially for the tourism and aviation sectors. Efforts were also made to support the territory's largest economic driver, mining.

The Government of Canada has provided critical support to the GNWT, NWT Indigenous governments, businesses, the non-profit sector, and individuals in managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Canada's rapid and far reaching national response and strong support of the NWT's efforts will continue to be essential to help the NWT emerge stronger from the pandemic. The GNWT will continue to build our partnerships

with the Government of Canada to ensure that opportunities for federal investment and funding meet the social, economic and health needs and priorities of NWT residents, and support new funding relationships with Indigenous governments.

The Business Advisory Council (BAC) began meeting in June 2020 with the mandate to provide advice on mitigating the short-term economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on NWT businesses and recommend longer-term actions to support businesses in their recovery. The GNWT implemented a number of the BAC's initial recommendations to help mitigate some of the short term impacts on NWT businesses. More recently, BAC provided recommendations outlining various measures and actions for economic sustainability in the short, medium and long term and that are posted on the [Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment website](#).



The following is a summary of immediate steps taken by GNWT Departments and Agencies to support residents and businesses as a result of the pandemic:

- ✓ Provided an emergency allowance to Income Assistance clients and moved clients into a 'Wellness – Self-Care' productive choice to enable access to enhanced benefits.
- ✓ Established program to pay 75% fixed costs for licensed early learning and child care operators.
- ✓ Established program to subsidize 33% child care costs for licensed early learning and childcare spaces.
- ✓ Established program to provide wage top up for child care employees until August 31, 2021.
- ✓ Provided funding for enhanced cleaning of childcare spaces.
- ✓ Implemented Wage Top-Up to \$18/hr for 16 week period for all workers.
- ✓ Created COVID-19 technology and support grants for post-secondary students under Student Financial Assistance.
- ✓ Provided almost \$33M in financial support to the aviation sector.
- ✓ Deferred all student loan repayment obligations from April 1, 2020 to September 30, 2020 with no accumulated interest during this time.
- ✓ Exempted COVID-19 related income, including CERB/CESB and gifts from friends, families, benevolent organizations, and Indigenous governments, from Income Assistance client income.
- ✓ Established \$3M Growth and Recovery by Investing in Tourism Fund with the federal government.
- ✓ Established \$3.9M Regional Relief and Recovery Fund with federal support.
- ✓ Provided \$984K in additional funding through the Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development Program.
- ✓ Established \$250K Creative Industries Economic Relief Fund.
- ✓ Provided \$5M in additional funding to NWT HC to support COVID-19 housing needs.
- ✓ Provided Emergency Support funding to NWT sport organizations \$1.584M.
- ✓ Waived bridge toll, and truck permit fees.
- ✓ Provided a one year surface disposition rent holiday.
- ✓ Provided campground coupons and extended park season.
- ✓ Waived tourism operator licensing for 2020-21 and 2021-22.
- ✓ Waived health and social service professional fees.
- ✓ Waived food establishment permit fees.
- ✓ Waived fees for mineral assessment work and waived mineral claim and sector work for the year.
- ✓ Waived landing fees, lease and licensing fees, and airport concession fees.
- ✓ Provided NWT businesses with close to \$5.8M in relief through Business Development and Investment Corporation COVID-19 loan initiatives.
- ✓ Advance portion of net fiscal benefit transfer to Indigenous governments.
- ✓ Established the Business Advisory Council.
- ✓ Temporary removal of NWT Power Corporation load limiters.
- ✓ Established the COVID Secretariat to coordinate the pandemic response, including Protect NWT, isolation centres, and border patrol.
- ✓ Provided PPE to essential workers and supported the creation of new NWT-based manufacture of Personal Protective Equipment.
- ✓ Participating in the Buy North campaign and promoting staycations to support the travel tourism sector.
- ✓ Waived timber cutting charges and reforestation fees for the forest industry.
- ✓ Provided \$5M to support pandemic-related housing needs
- ✓ Waived outfitter and guide licence fees.
- ✓ Provided \$4.738M to community governments Introduced recycling operator support program.
- ✓ Increased patrols to address greater numbers of people going out on the land for food security and social distancing purposes.
- ✓ Worked with NWT Tourism to develop a template to obtain Chief Public Health Officer approvals for remote tourism operations, and provided information on best practices on health and safety measures for remote tourism operators.
- ✓ Provided \$3M of federal funding to support support labour market recovery through wage subsidies and small community supports.
- ✓ Amended the *Employment Standards Act* to introduce unpaid job-protected Emergency Leave and to provide an exception to the notice requirements for group terminations in the event of an unforeseeable event or circumstance beyond an employer's control.
- ✓ Granted 63 temporary layoff period extensions to employers who had to temporarily lay off their employees due to COVID-19.
- ✓ Supported schools with shift to remote learning, high school credit waivers, land-based learning options, support for students with complex needs, and continued access to food programming and counselling services throughout the pandemic.
- ✓ Worked with Education Bodies to develop safe reopening plans for all 49 NWT schools for the 2020-2021 school year.

Appendix B - Early Economic and Social Impacts of COVID-19 on the NWT

Economic Impacts

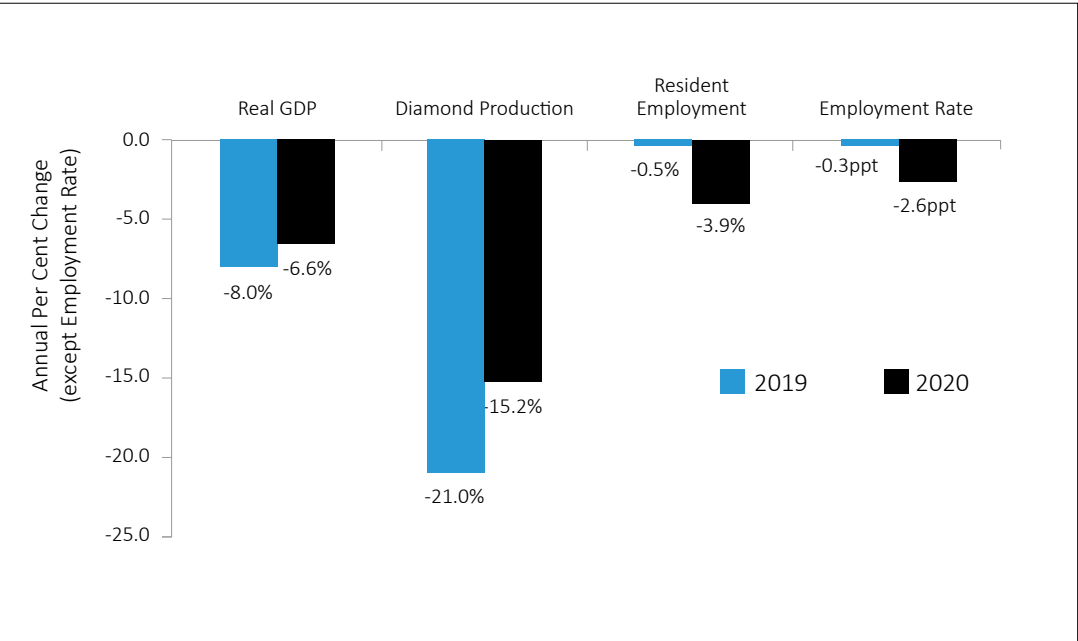
In 2019, a full year prior to the emergence of COVID-19, the NWT economy was in decline: real GDP shrank 8.8% in 2019 compared to 2018, diamond production dropped 21%, resident employment declined 0.5%, and the employment rate fell 0.3 percentage points. These declines signal structural and ongoing weakness in the NWT economy that has hindered growth and development for many years. This weakness is due to several ongoing challenges facing the NWT economy: a lack of economic diversification, aging diamond mines, and decreasing participation in paid employment. These pre-existing weaknesses and challenges were exacerbated and accelerated, but not solely created, by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The collective effect of the coronavirus and associated public health measures implemented to protect people resulted in a steep economic decline in 2020. Between 2019 and 2020:

- The overall NWT economy (measured in real GDP) shrank by 6.6%.
- Diamond production (measured in carats) dropped 15.2%.
- Resident employment (excluding fly-in/fly-out workers) declined 3.9%.
- The employment rate fell 2.6 percentage points to 63.1%, the lowest NWT employment rate on record.

The declines of 2020 were a continuation of weak economic performance of 2019, and unevenly distributed across sectors, industries, and demographics.

Chart: COVID-19 Exacerbated and Accelerated Pre-Existing Economic Weaknesses



Industries able to pivot to remote work, such as retail trade and public administration, have not experienced declines and in some cases have seen increases in economic output, activity, jobs, and employment. Nearly half of the NWT labour force is employed by the public sector, which acted as an economic stabilizer during the pandemic, but also emphasized the disparities between public and private sectors and further underscored the need for economic development and diversification.

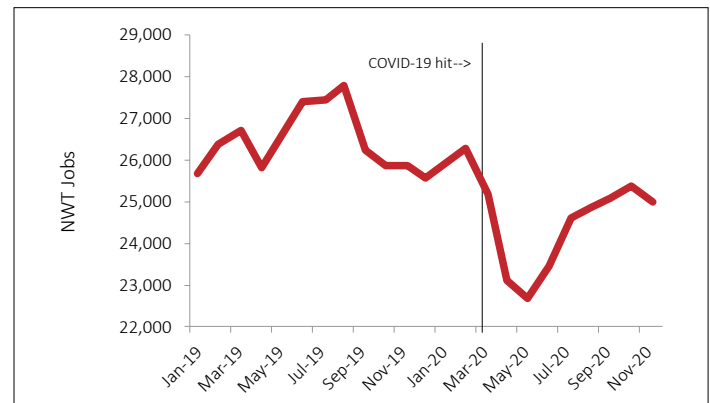
Another stabilizing factor was the ability of two of the three diamond mines to remain in production. As economic restrictions were eased during the pandemic, retail sales and other service industries less reliant on mining or tourism were able to rebound more quickly.

Export-reliant sectors, such as diamond mining and tourism, suffered deep declines due to global production and supply chains disruptions, international travel restrictions, and changing consumer preferences.

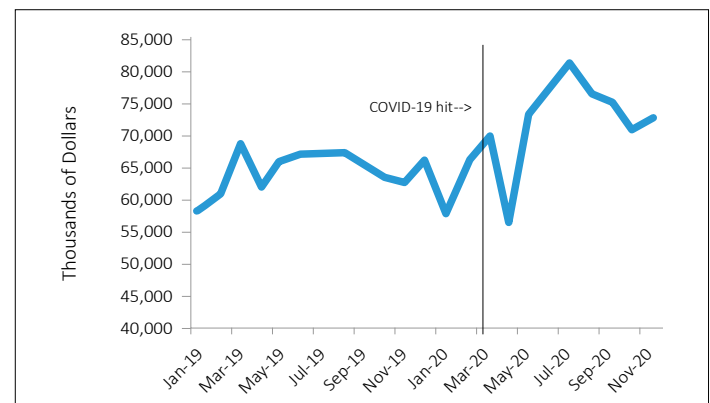
The economic decline associated with COVID-19 should be considered in the broader context of national and international recession. Much of the economic recovery in the NWT relies on recoveries elsewhere. Compared to many other jurisdictions the NWT has fared well and economic indicators that initially collapsed in March 2020 have either surpassed or nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Recoveries in retail sales, NWT jobs, household income, and hours worked, suggests the overall NWT economy was less severely damaged. The economic decline experienced in 2020 with COVID-19 was a continuation of consecutive years of poor performance. Addressing these long-term, structural challenges, rather than solely focusing on near-term supports to maintain or restore the economic status quo, is necessary for promoting stable and inclusive economic growth.

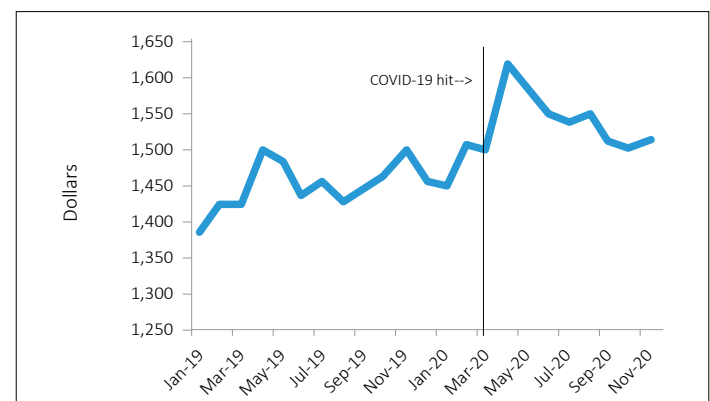
NWT Jobs nearly recovered all losses



NWT Retail Trade has surpassed pre-COVID-19 levels



Average weekly earnings are higher than pre-COVID-19



Appendix B - Early Economic and Social Impacts of COVID-19 on the NWT continued

Health and Social Impacts

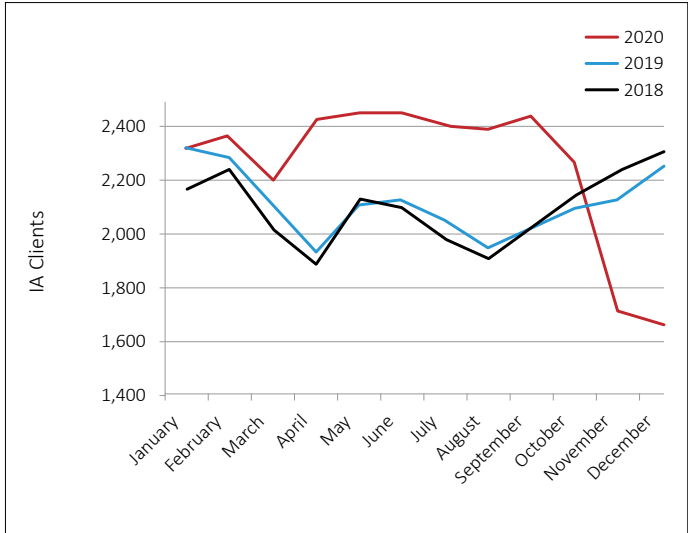
The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on residents’ ability to meet basic needs, as indicated by the increased client uptake in Income Assistance (IA) during the first months of the pandemic. From April to October 2020, IA expenditures witnessed 17% growth on average in 2020 compared to 2019. Payments have gone down since November 2020 when IA clients were required to provide documentation to verify their income which had not been mandatory during the initial months of COVID-19, and with recognition of payments provided by the federal government as income in IA benefit calculations.

While the health system has responded effectively to the pandemic, residents have experienced challenges as some health and social services moved from in-person to telephone

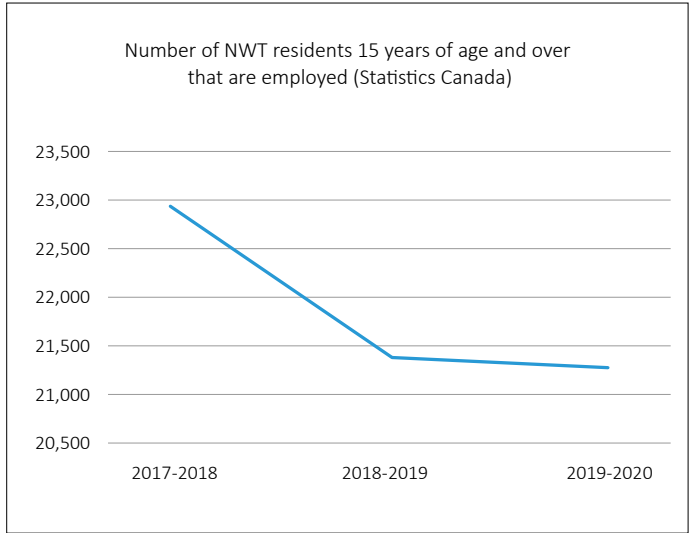
or virtual care, some program users were displaced by occupancy requirements associated with preventing COVID-19, and access to land-based and southern-based treatment facilities fluctuated. There are likely individuals who did not seek care as they would have before the pandemic. Employees in the health and social services system have been significantly affected by COVID-19 in terms of workload and the early public health measures that for many made managing work and family life a challenge.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had an impact on the recruitment and retention of qualified staffing, in part as a result of travel constraints across provincial and territorial, and even international boundaries. A number of professionals, including

Income Assistance Clients 2018-2020



NWT Annual Employment



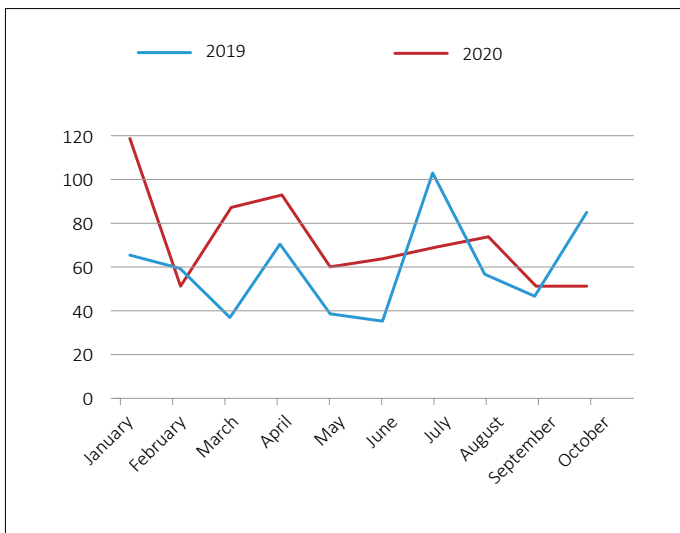
teachers, doctors, nurses and others with significant family connections must take these travel limitations into account when making decisions to take on or continue employment opportunities in the NWT. Without the support of professionals the vulnerability population can suffer even more.

The charts below compare 2019 and 2020 call volumes to the NWT Helpline and the percentage of calls related to anxiety and mood symptoms. While overall calls to the Help Line in 2020 saw an increase over 2019 during the first few months of the pandemic, it appears that overall call volume has been lower than 2019 during the fall of 2020. Calls specific to anxiety and mood were initially lower during the pandemic period than in

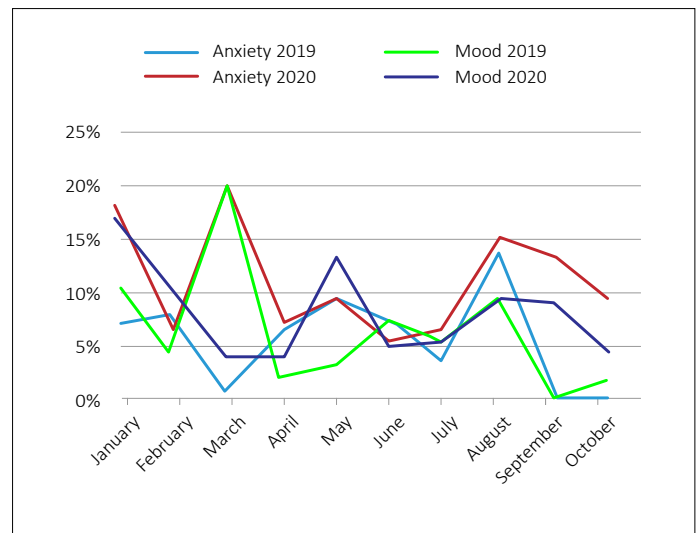
2019, but between August and October 2020, increased over the previous year.

Across Canada, 18% of Canadians reported consuming more alcohol due to COVID-19, attributing the increase to a lack of a regular schedule, boredom, and stress. The availability of alcohol varies by community in the NWT, with retail sales of alcohol available in only six out of 33 communities. According to alcohol sales data shown below, spending on alcohol across the NWT increased in 2020, compared to the same months in 2019. Since April 2020, most months saw an increase of approximately 20% in sales.

NWT Helpline Calls by Volume - A Comparison Between 2019 and 2020



NWT Helpline Calls Related to Anxiety and Mood Symptoms - A Comparison Between 2019 and 2020



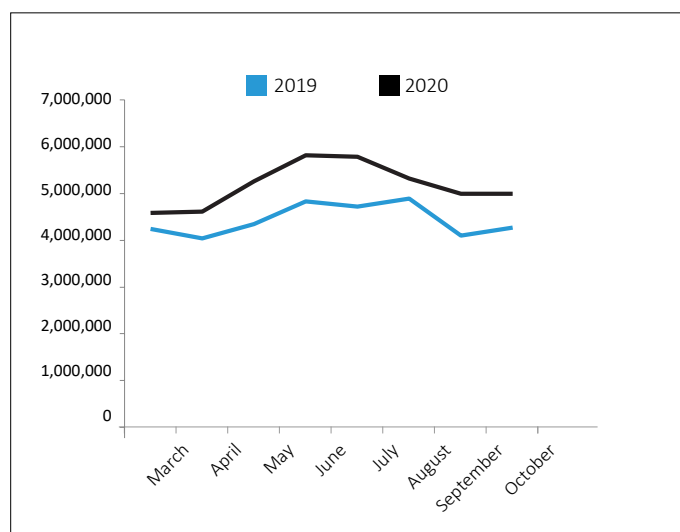
Appendix B - Early Economic and Social Impacts of COVID-19 on the NWT continued

The GNWT continues to monitor and report on a range of social indicators including child maltreatment and neglect, mental health and addictions, alcohol related harms and family violence. An early report on these indicators was released in January 2021 and is available on the [Department of Health and Social Services website](#).

between these indicators to inform ongoing program planning and service delivery in the short term and beyond the pandemic. We will also utilize additional social indicators beyond the health care system to better inform all of our social programs.

The GNWT will continue to focus on key areas of intersection

Monthly Alcohol Sales



Appendix C - Emerging Stronger Plan

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
Continue to adapt and respond to challenges in an efficient, coordinated and evidence-based way	<p>Build a better foundation for more responsible fiscal policy by aligning public funding with priorities through implementation of Government Renewal</p> <p>Improve data collection and reporting to residents on the performance of government programs</p>	<p>12-18 months per department</p> <p>Annually through departmental business plan process</p> <p>Annually through departmental business plan process</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Government Renewal initiative staged implementation by department</p> <p>All New Initiatives include performance measurement and public reporting</p> <p>Tracking and reporting on results developed for existing programs</p> <p>Quarterly reporting on a range of social and economic indicators</p>
Build stronger partnerships with Indigenous governments and organizations, community governments and the non-profit and charitable sector	Establish an external advisory table focused on strengthening the role and capacity of the not-for-profit sector, and focusing and expanding the caring economy	Fall 2021	External advisory table established

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
	Continue direct engagement with Indigenous governments, including through a multilateral table to ensure greater collaboration among the GNWT and Indigenous government leadership	Ongoing	Regular meetings held with Indigenous governments, including multilateral table
Advance emergency response work based on lessons learned from initial stages of pandemic	<p>Conduct after-action reviews and other system improvement initiatives, including for the COVID-19 Incident Management Team</p> <p>Work with community governments to update Community Emergency Plans and provide Pandemic Specific Hazard Plan and Essential Service Plan templates to ensure inclusion of emergency sheltering and pandemic response needs</p>	<p>September 2021</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>After-action review of COVID-19 Incident Management Team completed and recommendations made for consideration in updating the NWT Emergency Plan</p> <p>Community Emergency Plans and Pandemic Specific Hazard Plan and Essential Service Plan templates are updated</p> <p>Education and workshop materials are updated to encourage more frequent review of emergency plans to ensure they remain current and incorporate changes to roles, responsibilities, and hazard risks</p>

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
	<p>Improve and expand existing emergency response training to municipal governments to include Emergency Planning Workshops and tabletop exercises based on identified community risks, and an online webinar tutorial on updating Community Emergency Plans</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Fall 2021</p>	<p>5 Emergency Planning Workshops completed per year</p> <p>Online webinar tutorial on updating Community Emergency Plans developed and launched</p>
<p>Further efforts to support broadband infrastructure for fast and reliable internet services across the NWT</p>	<p>Continue to press for federal policy changes to ensure applications for investment recognize the NWT's challenges.</p> <p>Urge the CRTC to take action to regulate rates for internet services in satellite communities; provide ongoing portable subsidies to lower rates for residential and business internet services; review the terms and conditions of wholesale access by competing service providers; and make network improvements to enhance reliability</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing as per formal CRTC proceedings</p>	<p>Efforts made to lobby the federal government for policy change</p>

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
Meet the needs of vulnerable populations	Improve existing Income Assistance program to ensure the types and levels of benefits, and income exemptions, are meeting the basic needs of NWT residents	Fully implemented by 2023	Changes to Income Assistance program are implemented
	Advance work on integrated service delivery by developing the framework to support change within our systems, and exploring practical demonstration opportunities to improve timely and effective access to programs	2021-22	Conceptual Framework developed, demonstrating the foundations for the initiative
		2021-22	Completion of engagement and change management plan and commencement of engagement with communities
	Use key, NWT-specific information to create an NWT approach to managed alcohol and accelerate work on the Alcohol Strategy and review the regulatory changes introduced during the pandemic	September 2021	Managed Alcohol Program model developed
		November 2021	Alcohol Strategy drafted
	Work with partners to address longer-term funding needs required to address gaps identified during the pandemic	2021	Longer-term funding needs for shelters addressed

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
	Undertake a review of Northwest Territories Housing Corporation policies	2021 2021	Review of policies completed Policy changes developed and enacted
Improve health care services and expand equitable access to care for all Northerners	<p>Plan and implement a new Electronic Medical Record system, including scoping options for improving the ability of patients to access information from their health record and providers</p> <p>Accelerate development of a plan to sustain virtual care solutions rapidly deployed in response to the pandemic, including improved phone and video-based consultation and e-prescribing</p>	<p>June 2021</p> <p>January 2024</p> <p>June 2021</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>June 2021</p> <p>December 2021</p>	<p>Electronic Medical Record replacement planning initiated</p> <p>Electronic Medical Record replacement implemented</p> <p>Planning for virtual care improvements initiated</p> <p>Virtual care improvements Implemented</p> <p>Health professions regulatory proposal to enable ongoing provision of virtual care in the NWT developed</p> <p>Regulatory amendments made</p>

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
Provide accessible, quality post-secondary education and training	Continue to provide post-secondary students with increased funding to assist with additional costs associated with online learning	Starting in the 2021-22 academic year	Increased funding provided
	Review the Student Financial Assistance program to ensure benefits support students to achieve their post-secondary goals, with a special focus on removing barriers to post-secondary participation for Indigenous students	Beginning of the 2023-24 academic year	Revised SFA program is implemented Indigenous student participation is increased
	Increase access to post-secondary education opportunities at Aurora College, including through the continued expansion of online course offerings	Starting in the 2021-22 academic year	Increasing number of courses offered Increasing uptake of courses
	Expand and enhance Aurora College's teaching and research facilities across the North	Starting in the 2022-23 academic year	Polytechnic University Facilities Plan completed, including plans for the incremental expansion of community learning centres, research facilities in Inuvik, student housing in Fort Smith and a campus in Yellowknife

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
	<p>Provide more diverse post-secondary education opportunities for residents, including increased access to learning in every community, ladder programming from literacy to upgrading to certificate to degree, through the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university</p> <p>Continue to defer or make optional large scale student assessments such as Diploma Exams and Alberta Achievement Exams for JK-12 students</p> <p>Continue to provide supports to Education Bodies and schools for online, remote or blended learning, including internet access and devices like Chromebooks and Turbosticks, upon request</p>	<p>Starting in the 2024-25 academic year</p> <p>May 2025</p> <p>For the duration of the pandemic</p> <p>For the duration of the pandemic</p>	<p>Expansion and enhancement of community learning centres</p> <p>Polytechnic university launched</p> <p>Student assessments made optional</p> <p>All students able to access remote learning supports</p>

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
Better support and integrate work-force development within infrastructure projects	<p>Work with Indigenous governments, communities and businesses to improve training investments and career pathways</p> <p>Provide regional based Career and Education Advisor supports to all grade 9-12 students to assist students in post-secondary decision-making and planning</p> <p>Invest in apprenticeships through the NWT Housing Corporation and the Department of Infrastructure</p>	<p>2021-22 and ongoing</p> <p>Beginning in the 2021-22 school year</p> <p>2021 and ongoing</p>	<p>Number of training and employment opportunities for Indigenous workers on infrastructure projects</p> <p>Regional-based Career and Education Advisor supports provided to all grade 9-12 students</p> <p>Number of apprentices hired</p>
Ensure that GNWT capital planning supports equitable opportunities throughout the territory, and a greener more climate resilient territory	<p>Accelerate the review of GNWT procurement policies including the Business Incentive Policy and the Negotiated Contracts Policy, and consideration of an Indigenous Procurement Policy</p> <p>Invite Indigenous governments and businesses to be involved as equity partners in key strategic investments as projects develop</p>	<p>Fall 2021</p> <p>Begin implementation 2022</p> <p>Timeline dependent on each project</p>	<p>Procurement review and GNWT response completed</p> <p>Policy amendments proposed and implemented</p> <p>Indigenous government and business involvement in projects</p>

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
Support the Hardest Hit Sectors	<p>Seek to assist the tourism, aviation, construction, hospitality and the mining sectors to position for survival and eventual rebound</p> <p>Work with the Northwest Territories Tourism (NWTT) to reestablish positive public sentiment towards travellers entering communities</p> <p>Invest, through NWTT, on marketing to Canadian domestic travellers and support businesses to compete for domestic and eventually international tourists once NWT borders are set to re-open</p> <p>Work with NWTT, operators, and businesses as appropriate to provide clear communication on the public health criteria, including infection rates, control of COVID-19 variants of concern and vaccination rates, that will drive changes in travel restrictions and allow tourism operators to position themselves for rebound and to further open up</p> <p>Provide mineral exploration prospectors and companies that are unable to work their mineral claims with the ability to extend their tenure via the Work Credit Program.</p>	<p>Spring 2021 and ongoing</p> <p>2021</p> <p>2021 and ongoing</p> <p>2021 and ongoing</p> <p>2021 and ongoing</p> <p>Spring 2021</p>	<p>Measures taken to assist industries for survival and rebound</p> <p>Strategy developed and implemented</p> <p>Marketing campaign developed and implemented in addition to the work conducted under <i>Tourism 2025</i></p> <p>Criteria developed</p> <p>Communications and activities planning implemented, including workshops</p> <p>Program is rolled out</p>

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
Better support businesses	Better align business support programs, and further examine existing roles, resources and support	April 2021	Changes made to business support programs to improve alignment
	Examine existing contribution programs to ensure priority on northern benefit and investment	Spring 2021	Economic development programs reviewed, changes implemented
	Accelerate the work underway to reduce red tape	Ongoing beginning in 2021-22	Red tape reduction measures implemented and results reported by working group
	Enhance Business Development and Investment Corporation financial programs and expand investment options in response to changing needs of NWT businesses while also advancing legislative amendments and improving operational processes	December 2021	BDIC program design options developed
		October to December 2021	Legislative consultation and engagement undertaken
		Summer 2022	Legislative amendments drafted

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
Expand and diversify the economy	Work with Indigenous governments, development corporations, the mining industry and all regulatory partners to find ways to move proposed mine expansions and advanced projects into the production phase with community support	Spring 2021 and ongoing	Update communications tools and work to help bring communities, Indigenous governments, development corporations and the mining industry together in the creation of a common vision for resource development
	Work closely with the federal government and Indigenous governments and organizations to prioritize and implement remediation projects	2021 and ongoing	Progress made on remediation projects
	Assess the potential for development of a 'remediation economy' within the NWT	Summer 2021	Opportunities identified, actions proposed
	Attract and facilitate grassroots prospecting and exploration in areas of high mineral potential	Spring 2022 and ongoing	Promotion and marketing efforts adapted to new technologies and methods of communication including Environmental, Social and Governance. Coordinated pathfinding for explorers. Mining Incentive Program funding provided to a wider range of projects and efforts made to increase program budget

What We Will Do	How We Will Do It	Timeline	How We Will Demonstrate Progress
	<p>Work with the Conference Board of Canada to update the <i>NWT Labour Market Forecast and Needs Assessment</i> to the year 2035, including consideration of the mining and remediation, tourism, knowledge, housing and infrastructure economies</p> <p>Renew and implement the <i>Skills 4 Success Action Plan (2021-2025)</i> to meet the demand and supply needs of the NWT labour market</p> <p>Update and launch economic diversification strategies including the <i>Agriculture Strategy</i>, which includes a focus on small scale foods, the <i>NWT Arts Strategy</i> and the <i>NWT Film Strategy</i></p>	<p>September 2021</p> <p>Public engagement completed by the end of 2021</p> <p>Beginning Summer 2021</p>	<p><i>NWT Labour Market Forecast and Needs Assessment</i> updated to the year 2035</p> <p>Action Plan completed and implemented</p> <p>Strategies are tabled and implementation plans reported on</p>



English

French

Cree

Tłchq

Chipewyan

South Slavey

North Slavey

Gwich'in

Inuvialuktun

Inuktitut

Inuinnaqtun

French:

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