

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH BY THE NUMBERS - A BACKGROUNDER DOCUMENT.

Better Together.



INTRODUCTION

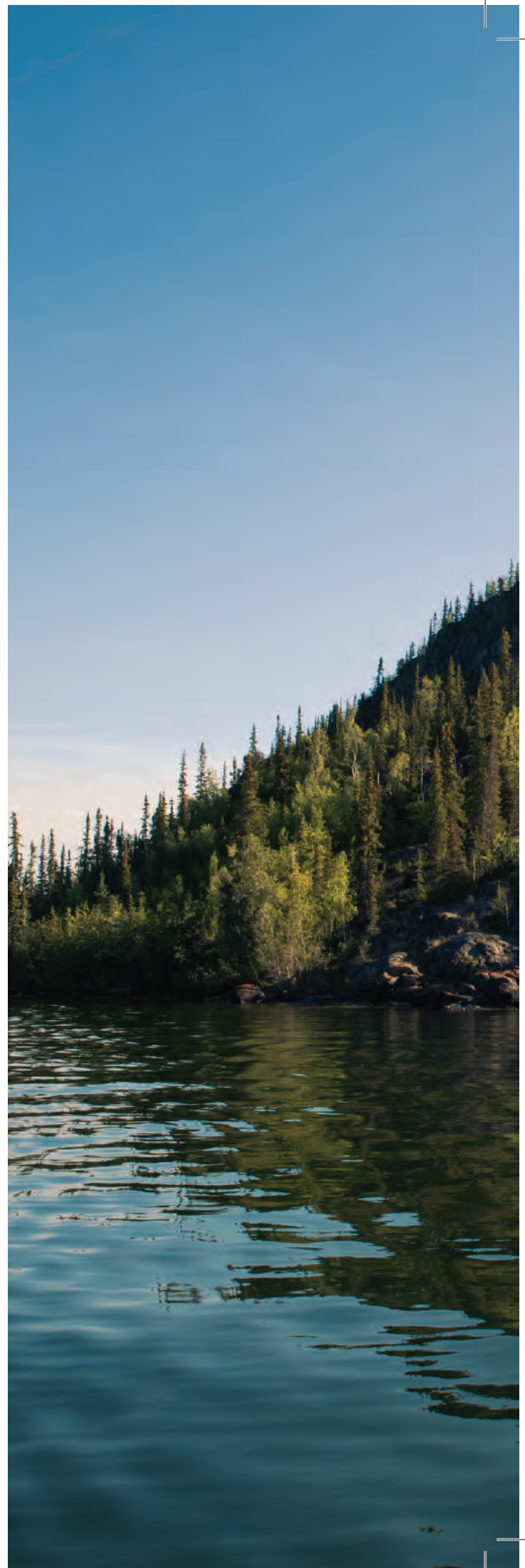
We live in a beautiful territory. We are surrounded by natural gifts: lakes, rivers, clean air, strong trees, plants and wildlife. The people of our territory have been caretakers of this land for thousands and thousands of years, and over time, communities have benefitted socially and economically from easy access to this abundance. Our NWT communities have many strengths; there are engaged community members who volunteer their time to support their neighbours and relatives, and youth are supported by elders to learn traditional ways. There are many events and gatherings to bring community members together to enjoy music, share food and celebrate. Communities are supported by organizations, volunteer groups and by government.

We are not a territory without challenges though. Many of our communities and people struggle with challenges of access to housing, the cost of living, unemployment, poverty, addictions, family violence, mental health concerns and isolation. NWT communities are suffering an erosion of lifestyle and traditional culture arising from a history that includes colonization, residential schools, as well as impacts of climate change and development. Healing is a priority for communities.

The factors that can positively or negatively influence personal, social, economic and environmental well-being are often referred to as the social determinants of health.¹ Well-being is strongly influenced by these elements and the quality of life in communities is important “because we derive physical, mental, spiritual and emotional sustenance from our involvement with others”.² In the NWT community governments and community leaders are keenly interested in these factors because they influence and shape the day-to-day experiences and the futures of the people they represent.

PURPOSE

The Board of the Northwest Territories Association of Communities' (NWTAC), through its Strategic Plan 2019-2021, has identified the goal of Community Healing as a priority area for action. NWTAC wants to understand community needs with respect to healing, and where it can best provide support and be a catalyst for healing action among community governments. NWTAC recognizes there is much work to be done and believes that the best way to accomplish this goal is for **communities to work together**. The document was developed to engage discussions regarding 'social envelope/social determinant' factors and the resulting impacts on the well-being and quality of life being experienced in NWT communities. This backgrounder document has been developed to provide a snapshot of select current data on the social and economic well-being of the Northwest Territories. At the end of the document, some questions are provided to help guide the discussions.





WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The following are some examples of information that reflect the current experiences of NWT residents. Data on measures of community well-being include such things as: income, employment, education, early childhood development, and housing. Information has been gathered from a variety of sources with the most recent publicly available data provided and references for sources noted at the end of this document.

INCOME

In 2017, the average family income in the NWT was \$134,057. However, the percentage of NWT families with an income less than \$30,000 in 2017 was 12.9% and with an income more than \$75,000 was 66.2%.³

The average family income in 2017 in Yellowknife was \$161,976. In the other larger communities (Hay River, Fort Smith and Inuvik), it was \$127,746 and in the rest of the communities it was \$92,100.⁴

In 2015, the NWT had the highest median household income in Canada at \$117,688. However, in 2015, 7.4% of NWT families earned less than \$30,000, and in lone-parent households, 20% of families earned less than \$30,000.⁵

In at least 13 NWT communities, the median household income was below the Canadian median of \$70,336.⁶

MARKET BASKET MEASURE

This measure is a way to determine how much an average family of two adults and two children needs to earn to achieve a modest standard of living. It is a national measure of low income based on the cost of a fixed basket of goods including the cost of food, clothing and footwear, transportation, shelter and other expenses. In the NWT, it's been adjusted in the clothing portion to better reflect life in the North. Currently, this measure is only available for 6 NWT communities however, the Federal Government is considering establishing a northern-based measure for the territories in future. The market basket measure has been calculated for regional centres in 2018 as follows:

Fort Simpson - \$69,336

Fort Smith - \$60,911

Hay River - \$64,190

Inuvik - \$75,107

Norman Wells - \$82,336

Yellowknife - \$59,853⁷

EMPLOYMENT & UNEMPLOYMENT

In December 2019, the NWT employment rate was 63.5%, compared to the Canadian rate of 61.7%, and at the same time, the labour market participation rate in the NWT was 69.3% compared to the Canadian rate of 65.0.⁸

In 2018, the employment rate in Yellowknife was 78.1% and in the rest of the territory, it was 55.7%.⁹

The overall NWT unemployment rate in 2019 was 8.2%, while the overall Canadian rate was 5.7%.^{10,11}

In Canada, lower levels of formal education are strongly related to higher unemployment rates; in 2016, the NWT unemployment rate was 15.6% for those with less than a high school education.¹²

EDUCATION

Results show that between 40% and 55% of grade 6 and 9 students score acceptable or higher on Alberta Achievement Tests in the Northwest Territories. However, this must be interpreted with caution as it has been found that over time, between 20 - 35% of students do not write these tests.¹³

The overall NWT 2018 high school graduation rate

(using the Department of Education, Culture and Employment's new calculation method) was 61.3%. In the Regional Centres, this rate was 83.1%, in Yellowknife 72.4% and in the smaller communities it was 33.1%.¹⁴ The most recent available data from 2015-2016 indicates that the Canadian on-time graduation rate was 79%.¹⁵

65% of NWT high school graduates go on to take post-secondary education or training.¹⁶

More than three quarters of the jobs that will become available in the Northwest Territories over the next 15 years will require post-secondary education, extensive work experience and seniority, or a combination of all three.¹⁷

In 2019, nearly 80% of the NWT working age population had a high school diploma or higher level of education. Of the 8,456 people with College or Trades training, 54.1% were males and 45.6% were females, and of the 6,460 people with a University degree, 40.4% were males and 59.3% were females.¹⁸

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Results of the NWT Early Childhood Development Indicator Instrument Report (2012-2017), indicates that for 2015-2017, 42.1% of 5-year-old children in the NWT are considered to be developmentally vulnerable, an increase from 38.1% in 2012-2014.¹⁹

The instrument measures children's developmental health in five areas, and being vulnerable means that children are at an increased risk of difficulties and, without additional support, may continue to experience challenges as they progress through school. Currently, NWT vulnerability ranks the highest in Canada. Vulnerability has been increasing across Canada.²⁰

FOOD INSECURITY

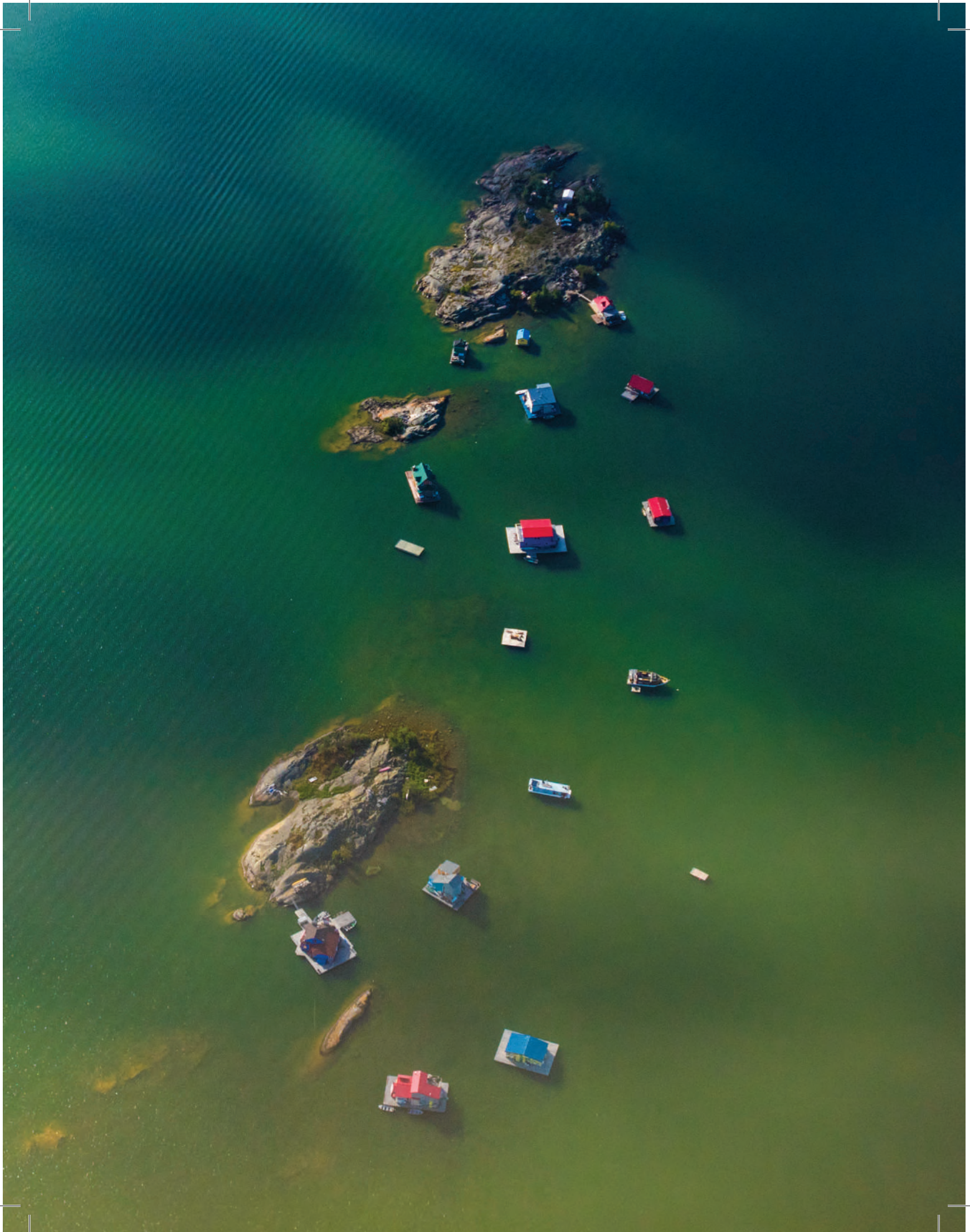
In 2014, about 22% of NWT households indicated they were often or sometimes worried that food would run out before they had money to buy more.²¹

In 2014, the percentage of the NWT population aged 12 and over experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity was 19.3% compared to 7.3% in Canada.²²

HOUSING

In 2019, 42.7% of dwellings in the NWT had a least





one housing problem, where a housing problem is considered to be either a problem with affordability, adequacy or suitability. This ranged from 30% of dwellings in one community to 90% of dwellings in another.²³

Many homes in some smaller communities (50% of dwellings) require major repairs and communities with relatively larger family sizes were more likely to have housing suitability issues.²⁴

In 2019, 54% of dwellings in the NWT are owned and 46% are rented.²⁵

In Canada, 5.1% of Canadian households reported living in a dwelling that was not suitable for them and 7.1% reported that their dwelling was in need of major repair.²⁶

HOMELESSNESS

In a 2011 academic report, it was estimated that visible homelessness effects between 40-60 people annually, in Inuvik.²⁷

The 2018 Yellowknife Point-in-Time Homeless Count found there were 338 people experiencing homelessness during the count.²⁸

The most common reasons reported for homelessness in the Point-In-Time Homeless Count report were inability to pay rent/mortgage, addiction or substance use, conflict with spouse/partner and job loss.²⁹

The majority of persons (68%) experiencing homelessness in Yellowknife have migrated from other NWT communities.³⁰

MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTIONS

According to the 2018 Addictions Survey Profile, 56.4% of the population aged 15 and older in the NWT report their mental health as 'excellent or very good' and 11.5% report it as 'fair or poor'.³¹ The most recent Canadian information from 2012 indicates that 65.1% of people aged 15 and older perceived their mental health as 'excellent or very good' and 7.8% reported it as 'fair or poor'.³²

In the same Addictions Survey Profile, 25.8% of the NWT

population aged 15 and older report having used marijuana in the past 12 months. Nationally, 25% of people aged 15 and older reported having used cannabis in the past 12 months in a survey conducted between April – June 2019.³⁴

The percentage of the NWT population aged 15 and older who are considered heavy drinkers is 43%.³⁵ In the rest of Canada (excluding the territories), the percentage of the population aged 12 and older who are considered heavy drinkers is 19.1%.³⁶

The University of Victoria's Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation Project has calculated the 2014 cost of overall alcohol harm in the Northwest Territories to be \$56 million. The economic cost of alcohol in Canada for 2014 was estimated to be \$14.6 billion. Net revenue from alcohol in Canada in 2014 was calculated to be \$10.9 billion and for the same period in the NWT was \$30 million.^{37,38}

The rate of deaths by suicide in 2017 in Canada was 5.7 per 100,000 population, and in the Northwest Territories, it was 9.2 per 100,000 population.³⁹

OTHER INDICATORS OF WELL-BEING

In the NWT, 34.7% of people reported feeling a 'very strong' sense of belonging in their community, and a further 43.9% reported a 'somewhat strong' sense of belonging in 2014.⁴⁰

47.5% of people aged 15 and older in the NWT report having volunteered in 2013.⁴¹

In 2013, 44.7% of the NWT population aged 15 years and older reported having hunted or fished. In 2013, 28.3% of the NWT population aged 15 years and older reported having gathered berries, 23.3% produced arts and crafts, and 53.9% reported having spent nights on the land.^{42,43}

The percentage of the Indigenous population 15 years and older in the NWT who reports speaking an Indigenous language in 2014 is 38.5%.⁴⁴

In 2017, the overall incidence of intimate partner violence in the population aged 15 and over in the Northwest Territories was 2,906 per 100,000 population as compared to the rest of

Canada which was 313 per 100,000 population.⁴⁵

In Canada, the proportion of Indigenous persons in federal prisons is greater than 30%.⁴⁶ In the NWT, 83% of adult inmates in the three territorial corrections centres are Indigenous.⁴⁷

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

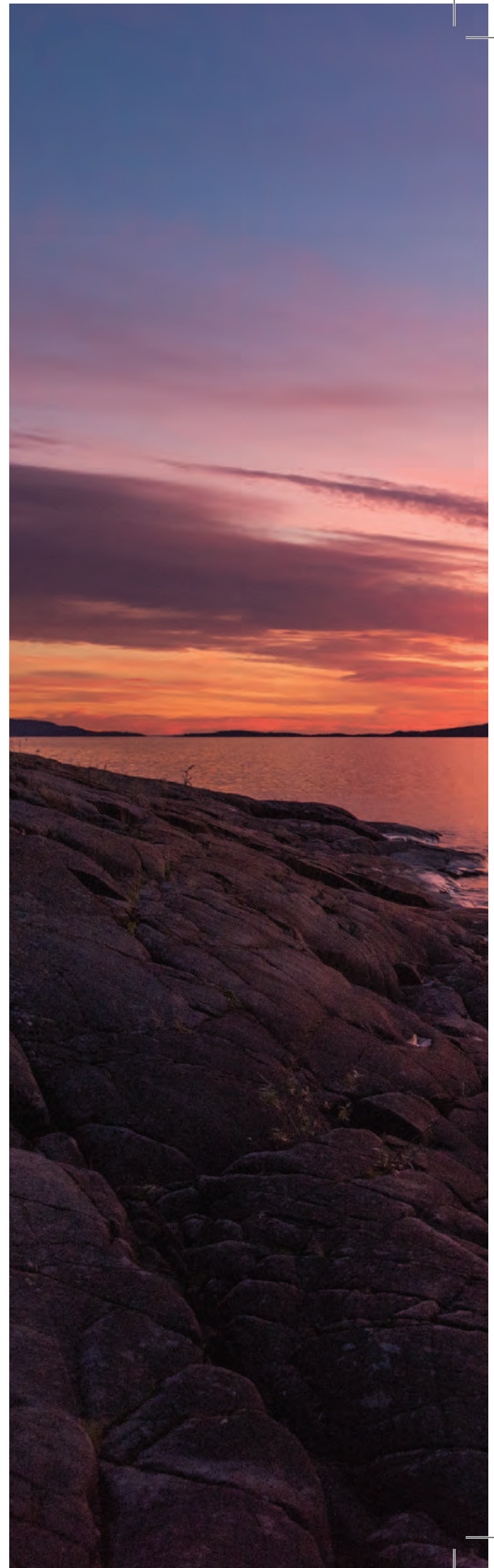
The Board of the NWTAC recognizes that many communities are feeling challenged. As the level of government that is by its nature closest to the people, we often acknowledge and face these challenges head-on, every day even if they are not technically our responsibility. There are numerous examples of successful initiatives and partnerships in NWT communities that are making a difference.

FOR EXAMPLE

- strategies to address youth wellness, including on-the-land activities;
- traditional knowledge sharing and cultural activities with youth and elders;
- warming and sheltering projects for homeless and marginalized individuals;
- home repair initiatives;
- greenhouse projects;
- food security and family meal programs;
- cultural revitalization projects;
- wellness initiatives aimed at men; and,
- many other examples of successful interagency collaborations.

There are actions that can be taken to support community healing. When we think of the analogy of a person falling into a river who may face the danger of drowning, 'upstream' interventions are actions that are taken to prevent people from falling into the river, where 'downstream' actions are taken to either provide the person in the river with a lifejacket, or farther along the way, to pull them from the river to prevent them from drowning. Effective and meaningful actions can be taken at any point along the river, but the really impactful actions for the both the individual and the community, are those that address the root causes to prevent people from falling into the river in the first place. They are investment in social, economic, policy and regulatory structures that make it possible for everyone to meet their full potential.^{48,49}

In the past, NWTAC has provided resources such as the NWT Healthy Communities Tool Kit, and the Built Environment Guide & Active NWT Communities Toolkit, as well as resources on Community Planning, Climate Change, Traditional Foods and Cannabis Legalization as practical tools to support actions for community wellness. Under the leadership of the Board of Directors, there is a desire for further prioritization and momentum in this area by working together. Though there are needs unique to every community, change is best accomplished when we align our efforts; **we are better together**. As the unified voice for NWT communities, NWTAC is in the position to advocate for social wellness policy and resources and wants to further understand what assistance can support communities best.





QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Which of these are issues for your community?

What does community healing mean for you/your community government?

Who are the people and/or organizations who are working on these issues?

Does your community government have a role in addressing these issues?

What is needed to support success?

Are there success stories from your communities that you'd like to share?

How can the Association advocate for these issues?

Are there communal resources that the NWTAC can assist in developing?

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