

Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

Standing Committee on Social Programs

Report on the Review of the
2000-2003 Business Plans and the
2000-2001 Main Estimates

Chair: Mr. J. Michael Miltenberger

Standing Committee on Social Programs

June 20, 2000

THE HONOURABLE ANTHONY (TONY) WHITFORD, M.L.A.
SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

In accordance with its Terms of Reference, the Standing Committee on Social Programs is pleased to submit its report on the review of the 2000-2003 Business Plans and 2000-2001 Main Estimates for the Departments of Education, Culture and Employment; Health and Social Services; Justice; and the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.



J. Michael Miltenberger, MLA
Chair



14th ASSEMBLY

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL PROGRAMS

~ Committee Members ~

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Standing Committee on Social Programs Report on the 2000/2003 Business Plans and the 2000/2001 Main Estimates

General Comments

In the previous two years departmental Business Plans were developed to follow the framework set out in a Government-wide Business Plan, these Business Plans were developed in the absence of a Government-wide Business Plan. Committee Members do understand that time-constraints involved in putting together the Business Plans and Main Estimates at the same time, impacted on the ability of the Government to develop a Government-wide Business Plan. The Business Plans followed the same format as in previous years, and made it easier for Committee staff and Members to move from department to department during their review. However, the disappointing lack of detail and recognizable targets and measurable goals provided in the departments' Business Plans will be a concern for the Standing Committee on Social Programs.

Members expect to see a Government-wide Business Plan utilized in the formulation of the departmental Business Plans for the 2001-2004 planning cycle.

Committee Members were disappointed with the lack of apparent cooperation between the departments in the social program envelope. Members feel that because the departments serve the same "client" base there are opportunities that need to be explored by the departments in cooperation rather than isolation. These opportunities will be commented on later during the individual reviews of the Departments.

Department of Education, Culture and Employment

General

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment supplies a wide range of services. These include Early Childhood Programs; School Services; Education, Careers and Employment for Adults; Income Support; Culture, Heritage and Languages; and the Directorate, Regional Administration and Information Networks.

The Business Plan

During the review of the Business Plan, it was observed that, over the past three years, the Department has had little consistency in its strategies, outcomes and outcome measures. This, compounded with the majority of the targets being vague, make it extremely difficult for the department, let alone Committee Members, to evaluate progress.

This is not the first time that the Department has been cited for the lack of detail in the Department's plans. In the Committee's Report on the Review of the 1999/2002 Business Plans and 1999/2000 Main Estimates, the Committee expressed concern regarding the lack of detail in the goals, measures, targets and strategies in the Department of Education, Culture and Employment's Business Plans.

The 2000-2003 Departmental Business Plans stated, " The Department's strategies and objectives have been updated in the 2000-2001 Business Plan to reflect the input that the department received in updating its Strategic Plan in 1999. They have also been updated to reflect linkages to the broad goals of the Government of the Northwest Territories as outlined in *Towards a Better Tomorrow* (page 55; 2000-2003 Business Plans)". Again, the Department was vague when stating their new targets and outcome measures leaving the Committee unsure of what it was the Department was trying to achieve. Further, in reference to the Department's comment about the "2000-2001 Business Plan", Business Plans are for a three-year period, yet the Department is approaching planning as a one-year process. Over time, Ministers will change. Long range strategies and targets must be in place and worked toward regardless of ministerial changes.

Outcomes and Outcome Measures – Aboriginal Teachers

Members noticed that the Department did not supply a hard figure in the target for the number of Aboriginal teachers in northern classrooms. The Committee is of the opinion that the Department must reinstate a target number for Aboriginal teachers in NWT classrooms and this should be representative of the population it serves. Further, the Committee expressed concern that Aurora College should also be trying to increase the number of Aboriginal instructors in their programs.

Early Childhood Programs

During the review of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, the Minister stated that the Department was working with the Department of Health and Social Services in a framework for the review of the Healthy Children Initiative and the development and implementation of an inter-departmental territorial agenda for children.

In presentations made to the Committee by the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Education, differences in terminology and direction between the two departments were noted. Because of this, the Committee wonders whether there really are meaningful discussions taking place between the two departments. The Members need to see demonstrable proof that the Departments are indeed working together.

School Services

Student Support and Pupil Teacher Ratio

In March of this year, the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories passed amendments to the NWT *Education Act* to supply additional funding for student support services. Subsequently, a student needs assessment survey is being conducted to identify the scope of individuals requiring assistance. The public and educators have identified student support as a critical area that needs to be addressed. The Committee was disconcerted that the Department had not identified student support services as a critical issue and failed to address it in their business plans.

Members are concerned that the Pupil Teacher Ratio reduction accomplished by the recent amendments to the *Education Act* will not actually impact on the number of students in the classroom or provide any extra assistance for special needs. Members will not be pleased if these amendments result more administrators rather than actual assistance in the classroom.

The Department informed the Committee that the School Planning and Resource Committee would be making recommendations for disbursement of special needs funding. The Department further indicated that it did not see student support funding being linked to individual students. Recognizing the existence of magnet communities, the Committee is concerned that a per capita only funding formula for special needs funding may be used.

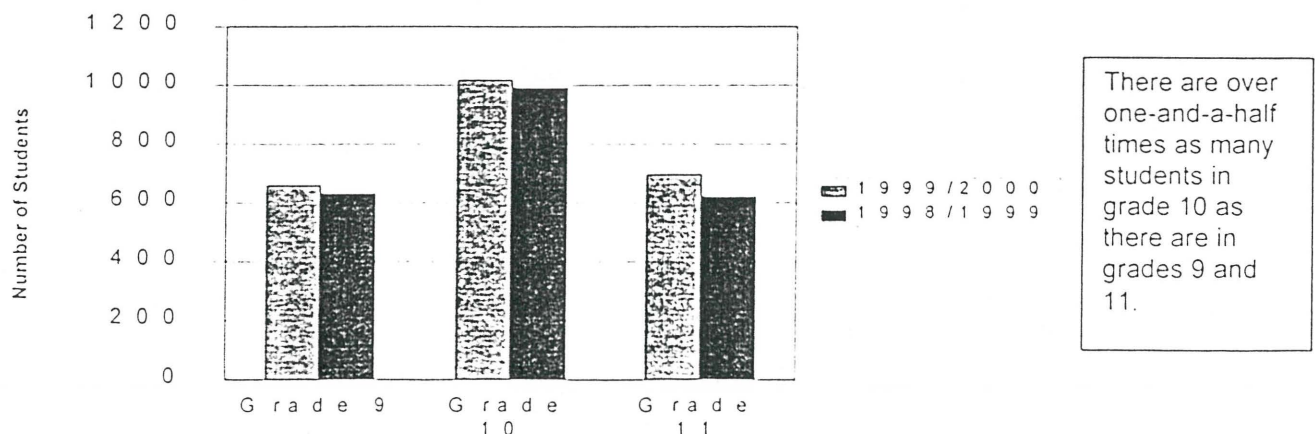
It is the opinion of the Members that funding must match community requirements; per capita only funding would be unacceptable unless it can be proven to be fair.

Number of Grade 10 Students

The Committee reviewed enrolment numbers for the past ten years and noted that there is constantly a "bulge" in the enrolment at the grade 10 level. There are consistently more students in grade 10 than in grade 9 in the previous year. It is also observed that there is not a corresponding increase in grade 11 enrolment the following year.

Committee Members believe that the bulge in Grade 10 enrolment may have more to do with the lack of Adult Basic Education programs in the communities than any other factor cited by the Department.

The Department referred the Committee to the departmental publication *Towards Excellence – A Report on Education in the Northwest Territories 99*. *Towards Excellence* cites a number of factors that contribute to the bulge: a proportion of youth re-entering the system who do not become part of a progressive group moving through the system; students who gained access through grade extensions; and students who decided to make high school their "productive choice" in order to access income support. The report also states that grade 10 reflects a shift in emphasis from placement to promotion as the basis for designating grade levels.



The Department indicated that more analysis was being done on the grade 10 bulge. The Committee agrees that there is a need for more analysis and looks forward to being appraised of any new findings.

Education, Careers and Employment for Adults

Apprenticeship Training

The Department has identified a need for skilled trade persons in the Northwest Territories. The Committee noted that over \$400,000 was lapsed in the area of apprenticeship. The Department indicates that one of the contributing factors for a decrease in demand for apprenticeship was that many people do not have the education levels necessary to enter into the programs. Committee Members also understand that many companies are reluctant to commit to apprentice programs targeting northerners because of the low education level of residents. The Members of the Standing Committee believe that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment must work closer with industry in identifying and getting northerners into apprenticeships. There is also a need for the Department to concentrate on Adult Basic Education so that northerners can take advantage of the Apprenticeship Program.

Adult Basic Education and Literacy

In the area of support for Adult Basic Education and literacy, the Department has dropped the ball. The Committee is concerned with the reduction in financial support for Adult Basic Education programs. For a number of northern residents, Adult Basic Education must be taken before they can access apprenticeship programs. How is it possible for people to move into apprenticeship training and trades if they cannot get upgrading?

The Committee was upset with statements the Minister made regarding the value of Adult Basic Education programs and the lack of statistical support for his comments. In order to make informed decisions regarding programs, the Department must have data on the success rate and value of these programs; statistics that are presently not in existence. Committee Members have received correspondence, filled with statistics, from Non-Governmental Organisations that contradict the Minister's assertion that statistics are not available. Regardless, Committee Members agree that there is a definite need for data collection and tracking with respect to the value and success of Adult Basic Education programs.

The Committee brought to the attention of the Minister that many Adult Basic Education courses are only offered during the daytime hours. In such cases, some adults wishing to pursue upgrading are not able to maintain daytime employment. Members would like to point out that by only offering Adult Basic Education during the day the Department is in fact, encouraging residents to quit gainful employment and go on Income Support in order to better themselves.

The Committee also noted that in some regions adults are returning to high school for upgrading. This may be due to the diminished offering of adult basic education programs. The Department was requested to do a cost comparison between the delivery of upgrading through high school and through Adult Basic Education programs.

Oil and Gas Training

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs were pleased to see that the Government has placed some priority on this activity by identifying ongoing funding and providing it to the Department as part of its base funding.

The Department of Education allowed some Committee Members a cursory glance at material that was produced in co-operation with the Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development for oil and gas training. Members would like to acquire copies of this material as soon as possible.

The Committee holds the opinion that it is better to be proactive rather than reactive and encourages the Department to move on this initiative now. Members caution the Department that there is a need for identification and training for long-term job opportunities in the oil and gas sector, in addition to the short-term construction and exploration jobs, that the proposed Oil and Gas Training Program seems to focus on.

Student Financial Assistance

Although the Student Financial Assistance Act was amended in the past session, the Committee feels that there are still some parts of the program that need to be changed to suit the needs of students. The Department is investing in distance learning so that individuals may access post-secondary courses over the Internet. Presently, no section of the Act offers support for learners enrolling in distance education courses.

Currently, the department has one central agency for the disbursement of Student Financial Assistance. The Department agreed to look at community control of SFA disbursements.

Committee Members are being made aware of many problems with the regulations that implement the redesign of the Student Financial Assistance Program. The application form itself is bulky because of income information required to determine whether a student is eligible for the Millennium Scholarship fund. Some Members of the Committee have questioned the ability of most people to comprehend the questions asked in the application form and whether it is necessary for all students to fill out the section that addresses Millennium Scholarships.

Members are concerned that the policy covering disabled students and the funding available to them may not be sufficient to meet the needs of particular students. The Minister may need the latitude to increase the amount available to a disabled student. It is not clear to Members that the Minister can make exceptions on available funding.

Members were also concerned with the Minister's reply to the Committee on "grandfather rights" for eligibility of the students presently accessing the Student Financial Assistance Program. This was provided in response to the Committee questions during the review of the proposed redesign of the Student Financial Assistance Program. Committee Members do not believe that the Department has the same understanding as the Committee on what grandfather clauses accomplish. To Committee Members a "grandfather clause" would mean that a student would maintain their previous eligibility under the new system. Committee Members are aware that the Department's new eligibility definitions reduce benefits for students already receiving Student Financial Assistance.

This was not the understanding that Committee Members had when they agreed to let the Minister provide details on continued student eligibility after Members approved the amendments to the *Student Financial Assistance Act*. To say that Committee Members are disappointed would be an understatement.

Members are sure that many more concerns about the new Student Financial Assistance Program will come to light over the next few months. The Committee will work to ensure that the Student Financial Assistance Program will be fair and accessible for northern students.

Integration of Income Support and Disability Pensions

The Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs are aware of programs in other jurisdictions that provide medical and financial help to permanently disabled residents. This assistance is basically a set amount (or pension) which when combined with all other sources of income allows the individual to not fall below a prescribed income.

In Alberta there is the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program which provides medical and income assistance to adults with permanent disabilities that severely impair their ability to earn a living.

People only receive AISH if they have exhausted all other possibilities for training, rehabilitation or employment. The current Income Support Program in the Northwest Territories as administered by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment makes no allowance for this possibility.

People with permanent disabilities are expected to make "productive life choices", like other income support recipients, regardless of whether these choices represent any meaningful gain for the disabled persons.

In some cases that Members are aware of residents receive too much money from the Canada Disability Pension to be eligible for Income Support.

In Alberta, AISH clients are also eligible for medical benefits such as; prescription drugs, glasses, dental work and medical travel and ambulance services. Committee Members envision a similar role for the Department of Health and Social Services in an integrated service delivery model in conjunction with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment in co-operation with the Minister of Health and Social Services; develop a model that ensures a minimum level of income for permanently disabled residents, and an assured level of healthcare benefits.

Culture and Heritage

Languages Strategy

The Committee is of the opinion that the government must revitalize and enhance their efforts to preserve Aboriginal languages in the Northwest Territories. The present approach is not successful. The Department plans to release a draft language strategy in June 2000. A review of the Official Languages Act is to be carried out at the first session in 2001. The Committee encourages the government to assume a more constructive approach in the preservation of all official languages of the Northwest Territories.

Human Resources

The Committee noted that the Department lapsed over \$400,000 in the Public Service Career Program; this lapse is more than the \$250,000.00 identified for the recently announced Staff Retention Policy. Committee Members are concerned that if the same conditions are attached to the Staff Retention Policy as are attached to Public Service Career Training Program they will be asking why the funding for the Staff Retention Policy lapsed during the next Main Estimate Review. The Committee will be monitoring the situation.

Department of Health and Social Services

General

The Standing Committee on Social Programs met on May 25, 2000, to consider the 2000–2003 Business Plan and the 2000/2001 Main Estimates for the Department of Health and Social Services.

The Department's Business Plan shows a high degree of correlation to the recent departmental strategic planning exercise. Committee Members were, however, disappointed by the lack of detail provided by the Department as to how it intends to measure success in meeting its stated goals. Without knowledge of the starting points and defined targets, the Committee, and indeed the Department, has no method of measuring success in meeting goals and objectives.

As the Members of the Standing Committee examined the Business Plan it became apparent that in many cases it was a "wish list" for the Department. The Committee certainly hopes that the necessary funding can be found to make many of these "wishes" come true. The Committee believes that it may not be appropriate to incorporate "wishes" as part of the Business Plan. These "wishes" provided Committee Members with an idea of the direction the Department would like to take in the future, but if initiatives are seen as so important they are included in the Business Plan, the funding should be allocated to them. At the very least the Committee expects to see a strategy laid out for examining program priorities, so we know the Department is looking at reallocation if new monies are not available.

Funding for Magnet Communities

There was a concern on the part of Committee Members that magnet communities are not adequately funded under the present funding formula. Committee Members were pleased to hear the funding formula takes into account historical spending patterns. The Committee is hopeful these spending patterns capture true usage.

Members are aware that many residents of the Northwest Territories make decisions on where they access our healthcare system based on the quality of services available in the facility. For example, many residents of Fort Providence prefer to access Stanton Regional Hospital in Yellowknife rather than H.H. Williams Hospital in Hay River.

This leads the Committee to question whether new services, like the CAT Scan machine in Yellowknife, are adequately funded over the long-term. Committee Members will be monitoring and seeking feedback from their constituents.

Health Promotion Strategy

Members were disappointed that there was no apparent linkages between the Health Promotion Strategy and the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. There is a belief amongst Committee Members that the issue of alcohol abuse needs to be front and centre of any Health Promotion Strategy. This is not apparent.

The communities have told MLAs and the Minister's Forum on Health and Social Services that their major health and social concern is the effect of alcohol on the community and its residents. The Health Promotion Strategy appears to be focussed on tobacco cessation programs rather than the community desire to focus on addiction treatment. The Committee notes that this community focus was strongly expressed in the Final Report of the Minister's Forum on Health and Social Services. The Department's lack of reaction in this area is puzzling and leads the Committee to wonder whether the Headquarters function of the Department is in touch with desires of our communities.

Committee Members were very concerned that written material produced under the Health Promotion Strategy be written in plain, simple English and translated into the appropriate Aboriginal languages. This concern relates to the low literacy level of many of our residents. Government information must be presented in a format that residents understand. This concern should be relayed to the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) that are preparing materials funded from the Health Promotion Strategy.

Members were very disappointed that funds lapsed last year under this activity. While Committee Members do accept the reasons that the Minister and her officials provided for the lapse, it is still hard for Regular Members to explain to their constituents why over \$400,000.00 lapsed under such an important activity. Some Member's constituents view lapses, as in this instance, as an example of why government funding should flow to the communities rather than being concentrated at the Headquarters level.

Many of the initiatives that are part of the Health Promotion Strategy are undertaken by NGOs. The NGOs have expressed concern in the past that single-year funding for projects does not allow them the flexibility to do any forward planning. They hire staff to run programs, but can only guarantee employment for as long as funding is in place.

The NGO's staff affected by year-to-year funding are understandably apprehensive and in many cases seeks alternative, stable employment. This of course leaves the NGO in the position of having to hire new staff. This constant staffing turnover reflects on the NGO's ability to deliver the program on behalf of the Government. The Committee notes that this not an issue particular to the Health Promotion Strategy, or even confined to the Department of Health and Social Services.

The instability created by year-to-year funding is a serious issue for most NGOs and for the Government Departments on whose behalf the NGOs deliver programs. If the Government is to meet the spirit and intent of "Towards a Better Tomorrow", it is imperative that we build co-operative relationships with NGOs that deliver our programs directly to the people. An important part of any co-operative relationship is a stable, multi-year funding agreement. The Standing Committee on Social Programs has forwarded this concern to the Accountability and Oversight Committee who will be making a recommendation on multi-year funding agreements.

Mental Health and Addictions Strategy

Members of the Committee and residents of the communities that they represent are very concerned about the current state of addiction treatment in the Northwest Territories. It is apparent to Committee Members that the redesign of the addictions treatment program is ongoing. There is some question as to whether sufficient, dedicated program space will be available in the upcoming fiscal year.

Contrary to the understanding of Committee Members, based on discussions during the Interim Appropriation, it is possible that the Department of Health and Social Services will be unable to utilise the Northern Addiction Services (NAS) facilities in developing its Addiction Strategy. Members recall being assured that by the time the Committee reviewed the Business Plans and Main Estimates there would be a viable Territorial Addictions Strategy in place.

Members are concerned that in the overhead presentation one of the Department's expected results for 2000/2001 was the development of a territorial strategy and action plan on mental health and addictions. No evidence was presented to the Committee that suggested the Department had an Addictions Strategy in place. Members must question whether any departmental efforts are being directed to actual addiction treatment support, or is the Department concentrating on the development of their strategy and action plan.

Given the importance communities place on addictions treatment, it seems to Committee Members that, too much time has passed since the Department has had an Addiction Strategy in place. This will be the second year that the Department has operated in the absence of a Territorial Addiction Strategy. This is not acceptable to Committee Members. Members are aware of the terrible toll that addictions take and believe that the time for action is now.

Committee Members would like to see the Territorial Addictions Strategy and Action Plan as soon as possible, so that they can offer comment and the Department can implement as soon as possible.

With NAS being successful in attracting federal corrections programming and funding to utilize the Dettah facility and the re-profiling of other addiction facilities, Committee Members must question where any programming under an Addiction Strategy, would take place. Members are interested in how the Addictions Strategy and Action Plan addresses facility needs.

In the case of the Franklin Avenue Detox Centre in Yellowknife, there is a viable proposal from four Yellowknife service providers to move the Women's Shelter to use this facility as part of a larger housing strategy. This would address emergency, transitional and hard to house needs.

Committee Members believe the proposed strategy "A Response to Housing Needs: Emergency, Transitional and the Hard to House" prepared by the Salvation Army, the Yellowknife Women's Centre, the YWCA and the Side Door is precisely the kind of partnership with Non-Governmental Organisations that is envisioned in "Towards a Better Tomorrow". Committee Members were disappointed to hear that there had been no meetings of the Departments in the Social Envelope to discuss the proposal as of our meetings on the Business Plans and the Main Estimates.

Committee Members believe that the previously mentioned organisations have taken the first step, they are co-operating with each other to meet a common goal. They have divided up responsibilities in this proposal to avoid duplication of services and in doing so avoid duplicate funding requests targeting the same client-base. This strategy may not save the Government any money in the short-term. However, the organisations do anticipate that they will be able to do more with the funding that is currently available because of the division of labour.

In the opinion of the Committee Members, the example of the four social agencies coming together to formulate a strategy, utilising and combining resources to meet a common goal should provide the Departments in the Social Envelop the impetus to work in concert to respond to the proposal.

Members look forward to being informed of the resolution of the proposal by the four Yellowknife service providers.

Committee Members also believe that the new Mobile Addictions Units, while a worthwhile stopgap measure, should not replace community based mental health and addictions infrastructure. For healing to occur at the community level adequate permanent facilities are required. The Department is asked to consider this in the development of its capital budget for the new Mental Health and Addictions Strategy.

Early Childhood Development and the Children and Youth Agenda

Committee Members were very disappointed in the lack of apparent cohesion between the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment in Early Childhood Development and Children and Youth Programs. In examining the Business Plans of the two Departments it appeared that there were two different programs, with two different agendas and terminology.

It was not apparent to Committee Members, through the examination of the Business Plans and Main Estimates, that there was any joint planning on these issues. It only became apparent that there was meaningful co-operation taking place when the Department of Health and Social Services provided a draft copy of the Children and Youth Agenda. This information was provided subsequent to the Committee's discussion with the Minister and her officials on the Business Plans and Main Estimates.

Members expect to see clear co-operation on these important initiatives in the next Business Plans for the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. It should be clear to anyone reading the document that the two Departments are partners in the programs.

Members are also aware that there may be significant amounts of funding available from the Federal Government in the near future. It should be stated again by the Committee that all service providers (Government and NGOs) need to co-operate to ensure that programs are not duplicated and that the children and youth of the Northwest Territories get the maximum use out of the available funding.

It was not clear to the Members of the Standing Committee what role the Minister Responsible for Youth has in the planning and future implementation of the Children and Youth Agenda. Committee Members believe that the role of the Minister should be clarified for the public.

Child Welfare League Review and Other Initiatives

Committee Members look forward to the opportunity to comment on the findings of the review of the Northwest Territories Child Protection Service completed by the Child Welfare League of Canada.

It is hoped that given the significant amount of money spent on hiring a southern contractor, the recommendations contained in this review will provide the Department with many ways to improve child protection in the Northwest Territories. Committee Members are committed to working with the Department to improve the Child Protection Services in the NWT.

In a related matter, there is concern on the part of Committee Members that the Department may have too many initiatives and reviews going on at the same time. While Committee Members do see the need for the initiatives and reviews the Department is working on, the concern is whether there are sufficient resources and staff to implement initiatives or analyse reviews. The Committee would like to remind the Department that Members would prefer to see programs or initiatives that are an unqualified success, rather than programs and initiatives that not meet their objectives.

Members will be examining future Business Plans to determine whether the Department has overextended itself.

Home Care Programs and Palliative Care

Members were disappointed to learn that the Metis are not included in the proposed Federal Aboriginal Home Care Initiative. The Committee is pleased to note however, that an excellent, integrated home care system already exists in the majority of communities in the Northwest Territories. It is hoped that service providers will continue this co-operation at the community level.

There is also a responsibility for the Department, the Boards and Local and Aboriginal Governments to work together within the existing system to improve the home care system and avoid duplication of services.

Committee Members would like to remind the Department that the projected doubling of the seniors' population in the next twenty years would place a strain on our home care system. The Committee believes that it may be appropriate for the Department to do some long-term planning in consultation with their partners in service delivery.

The Committee is also interested in the establishment of a respite care system for the Northwest Territories. Many of our residents assume the responsibility for caring for their loved ones at home. These people need our support so that they do not "burn out". If these caregivers do burn out, it is likely that their loved ones would end up in a healthcare facility, at a significantly higher cost to the residents of the Northwest Territories. Caregivers need an occasional weekend off. They need time to go shopping or to go doctor appointments.

Respite care can be as simple as the community nurse teaching another relative how to care for the loved one or being able to place your loved one in a long-term care facility temporarily. The Committee believes that more emphasis has to be placed on helping the caregivers to cope within their own communities.

Members are also concerned about the issue of palliative care. The doubling of the NWT's senior population in the next twenty years would logically double the need for palliative care options. The Department is strongly encouraged to ensure that adequate training and palliative care options are available for NWT healthcare professionals and residents as the need arises.

Members are aware that other Canadian jurisdictions have policies and legislation in place that deals with the issue of palliative care. The Department is encouraged to develop policies and legislation that would bring the Northwest Territories in line with practices in other Canadian jurisdictions.

Long-term Care Facilities and Repatriation from Southern Institutions

The Committee would like to commend the Department for their success in repatriating NWT residents from southern institutions. Unfortunately this success has eliminated capacity in NWT long-term care facilities; and limited the ability to repatriate residents from southern institutions.

Committee Members believe this need, coupled with the anticipated doubling of the senior population in the next twenty years, forces the Department to analyse projected need and develop long-term care facility plans.

When the Department does its analysis, the Committee requests the Department to also consider community wishes in developing its plan. Residents in communities without long-term care facilities are required to place their loved ones in communities within the administrative district (Board) they belong to. In the case of Fort Providence, this means Fort Simpson. This makes it very inconvenient for residents to visit their loved ones because the majority of people go to Hay River for shopping and their other health care needs. Committee Members believe that compassion and logic should be used in establishing which territorial facility is most appropriate.

Committee Members also realise that community wishes cannot always be accommodated because of the non-availability of the preferred facility. However, an effort should be made to accommodate the family.

Human Resources and the Recruitment and Retention Strategy

The Standing Committee noted that the Stanton Regional Board was the only Board whose information was contained in the PeopleSoft supplementary position information. Members wonder whether the Committee will have opportunity to review information for other Boards in the near future.

Unlike other Departments, which provided information on affirmative action statistics within the Department, the Department of Health and Social Services did not include statistics in their Business Plan. Even though the Department believes that this is a responsibility of the Financial Management Board Secretariat, there is still a clear role for the Department in presenting this information to the Committee during the Business Plan review.

Other than the affirmative action component of the Recruitment and Retention Plan, there is no clear affirmative action plan for the rest of the Department. Members of the Committee understand that the bulk of employees involved in healthcare in the Northwest Territories are Board employees and that a representative workforce is being worked towards at that level. Members would appreciate being advised of affirmative action statistics for the Department and the Boards in the next Business Plan.

Members are concerned that the Department is not doing an adequate job in promoting the results of the Recruitment and Retention Plan. Other than being advised by the Minister and her officials that the health and social service system is no longer in crisis, Members have nothing tangible to justify their continued support of the Recruitment and Retention Plan.

Recruiting trips to Europe, the high cost of hiring short-term staff through employment agencies and lapsed funds make it hard for Committee Members to justify the Plan at the community level. The public and the Members need visible indicators, such as affordable housing for health and social service workers, to prove that the Plan is working.

Members are aware of the requirement for Registered Nurses to upgrade to a Bachelor degree. Members of the Committee believe strongly that the Department must incorporate this requirement into the recruitment and retention strategy. There are nurses who are long-term residents, or who have made the commitment to the north that may not be able to practice in the future if this upgrading is not addressed. The Northwest Territories has enough problems recruiting nurses without compounding the situation by failing to deal with the requirement to upgrade nursing qualifications.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that the Minister direct the Department to examine the number of nurses practising in the Northwest Territories that will be required to upgrade their qualifications to a Bachelor degree;

And further, that the Minister develop a strategy as part of the Recruitment and Retention Plan to deal with this upgrading requirement.

Governance Issues

Committee Members acknowledge the trend in self-government negotiations for First Nations and their partners to want responsibility for the social service delivery component and preferring to leave the medical responsibility with the Boards. The major consideration being that, all participants in self-government negotiations realise that they have to work together to ensure continued service delivery to the residents that we all serve.

It will be a time of major change in the structure of how we deliver programs and services and there is a need for extensive consultation on the part of the Department and other service providers.

Committee Members believe that we have to do this right. Everyone's primary concern should be the health and safety of our residents. The change must not be allowed to jeopardize the health and safety of our residents.

It is noted that some regions have indicated a preference for a Community Services Board model. Whichever model of health and social service delivery that is chosen by each community or region, it is important that there is an audit function within the system to ensure program dollars are being spent correctly and that the health and wellbeing of residents is not being compromised.

In particular, it will be important for the Departments that are funding Community or Regional Service Boards to provide monitoring and program advice to the Boards and for these Departments to co-operate with each other.

Committee Members also believes it is important that there be full and adequate consultation between all parties as the process evolves.

Medical Travel Policy

Committee Members believe there are cases where the Boards have been too strict in interpreting the Medical Travel Policy. Residents of small communities do not have the same access to the health care system as residents of urban centres. If they do not agree with the diagnosis of the health care professional in their home community or if they want a second opinion they have no choice but to travel outside their community.

However, if the health care professional will not authorise medical travel for the patient to go to another centre, the patient has no choice but to cover those costs themselves. Even if the patient's complaint or concern is borne out at this other facility, the Regional Health Board will not reimburse the patient due to the lack of a medical referral.

This is unfair. Committee Members realise that the health care providers in the communities do the best they can with the resources they have, but they can make misdiagnoses. Everywhere else in Canada patients can easily get a second opinion. Unfortunately, in some of our communities this cannot be done without leaving the community and bearing considerable expense. There needs to be some common sense applied to the interpretation of the Medical Travel Policy.

Members believe that there has to be a second opinion or "escape clause" in the Medical Travel Policy. If the patient does not agree with the diagnosis of the health care professional in their home community and travel to another community and receives immediate treatment, the patient should be eligible for compensation. Members also would like to see an appeal mechanism that allows the patient to appeal the decision of the Board to the Minister.

Members were pleased to note that the Minister agreed that there might be circumstances that would warrant the repayment of medical travel expenses and that she was willing to examine the Medical Travel Policy. Members look forward to further discussion with the Minister on this issue in the near future.

On a related note, Committee Members believe that the Department and Boards must monitor medical travel costs in each community to ensure that they do not eclipse the costs of placing a doctor in the community. This is an issue that is of particular concern to the residents of Rae-Edzo.

Computer Records Security

The recent revelation that Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) had been maintaining large amounts of information about Canadians raises concern with Committee Members about the ability of the Department to maintain the security of their computer systems.

Members believe that the confidentiality of patient information is paramount. However there are circumstances where the informed consent of the patient should be sought so that information can be shared with social workers if it is within the scope of an agreed upon plan of care for the patient. Protocols need to be developed to accommodate this requirement.

For greater public comfort, the Members of the Standing Committee believe that the Department needs a publically stated computer security policy.

The Committee recommends that the Minister develop a computer security strategy for the Department that would restrict access to information and actual computer systems both physically and electronically;

And further, that this strategy should be communicated to the Department and Board staff and adequate training provided;

And furthermore, that elements of the strategy should also be communicated to residents of the Northwest Territories for greater public comfort.

Funding Implications

The Department has many ambitious initiatives that are dependent on new federal and territorial funding to be implemented. The Members support the intent behind these initiatives and hope that funding can be found.

However, Members were somewhat disappointed that the Department had no contingency plans in place should the anticipated additional funding fail to materialize. Committee Members believe that there is a need to establish priorities, so that the Department can, if necessary, re-profile their programs using the available funding. At a bare minimum, the Department needs to establish what the process would entail and who should be involved.

Reporting Requirements and Business Plan Format

Committee Members noted many of the same concerns that they had with the other Departments in the Social Envelope. It is hoped that many of these concerns are one-time anomalies that can be attributed to the usual frantic activity that accompanies a change in Government. The Committee looks forward to the Department addressing the following concerns in the next Business Plan cycle.

Some of the documents and studies that the Department used to justify the Business Plan had not previously been supplied to the Committee. Members of the Committee can hardly be expected to offer meaningful comment on the Business Plan if they do not have the necessary background information. The Accountability and Oversight Committee will be making a recommendation on this issue.

Members are concerned that the level of detail in the departmental overheads are better than the information supplied to the Committee in the Business Plan or Main Estimates. The Business Plans and Main Estimates become public records. The financial figures and statements that are used to justify these Business Plans and Main Estimates should also become part of the public record. Under the present system this is not possible. The Accountability and Oversight Committee will be making a recommendation to include this information in the Business Plan.

As with the other Departments, the Committee is disappointed in the lack of baseline information and the lack of measurable targets and goals. The Department has 12 years of baseline information. Without including this type of information Committee Members are unable to measure progress (or lack thereof) in a Department on a year to year basis.

The Committee appreciated the Minister's commitment to provide this type of information for the current Business Plan. The Committee looks forward to reviewing the new targets, goals and baseline information in the near future.

Committee Members believe there is a need for clear targets that the Department should try and achieve over a defined period. The Accountability and Oversight Committee will be making a recommendation on the need for all Government Departments to improve their reporting and measurement criteria for Business Plans.

Integration of Income Support and Disability Pensions

The Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs are aware of programs in other jurisdictions that provide medical and financial help to permanently disabled residents. This assistance is basically a set amount (or pension) which when combined with all other sources of income allows the individual to not fall below a prescribed income.

In Alberta there is the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program which provides medical and income assistance to adults with permanent disabilities that severely impair their ability to earn a living.

People only receive AISH if they have exhausted all other possibilities for training, rehabilitation or employment. The current Income Support Program in the Northwest Territories as administered by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment makes no allowance for this possibility. People with permanent disabilities are expected to make "productive life choices", like other income support recipients, regardless of whether these choices represent any meaningful gain for the disabled persons.

In some cases that Members are aware of residents receive too much money from the Canada Disability Pension to be eligible for Income Support.

Regardless of the problems inherent in the delivery of the actual Income Support by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, the Committee believes that the Department of Health and Social Services does have a role to play.

In Alberta, AISH clients are also eligible for medical benefits such as; prescription drugs, glasses, dental work and medical travel and ambulance services. Committee Members envision a similar role for the Department in an integrated service delivery model in conjunction with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

A recommendation to this effect was made in the review of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment and also applies to the Department of Health and Social Services.

Sustainability of Care

The Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs believe that it is time for the Department to initiate the process to lead an informed discussion amongst NWT residents on the sustainability of care.

The cost of technology in the healthcare field and the expectations of patients increase every year. At some point an affordability of care issue becomes apparent and enters into the discussion.

The Department does have the opportunity to tie this discussion to the Healthcare reform initiative.

Department of Justice

General

The Standing Committee on Social Programs met on May 31st, 2000, to consider the 2000-2003 Business Plan and the draft 2000/2001 Main Estimates for the Department of Justice.

Wilderness Camps

The Standing Committee on Social Programs believes strongly in the merits of the Wilderness Camps in meeting the needs of adult and young offenders. Members were pleased to hear that subsequent to discussions on the Interim Appropriation the Department of Justice made the decision to increase the per diem rate by \$6.00 / day per offender when out on the land.

From discussions with the Minister and his Officials during the review of the Business Plans and Main Estimates it was made apparent that the decision to increase the per diem rate was part of an initial review of the Wilderness Camp Program. Committee Members appreciated that this first step of increasing the per diem rate for on the land camp operators was made in advance of the finalization of the overall review of the Wilderness Camp Program.

Committee Members are of the opinion that the Wilderness Camp Program must have clearly defined program standards that are effectively communicated to camp operators. This relates to a Committee concern that the present system may not provide for a level playing field for all camp operators. Members hope that the Department's review of the Wilderness Camp Program will provide for program standards and address the funding concerns that many operators have. This also relates to a concern on the part of Committee Members that the need for defined program standards, coupled with new camps coming on-line, results in inadequate capital funds dedicated to the Wilderness Camp Program.

Finally, the Committee thinks that the review of the Wilderness Camps must include a rationalization component. Allowing competing camps to be set up in the same area does nothing more than ensure the failure of the two competing camps. It is clear that the limited number of inmates and programming dollars also dictates this rationalization of camp placement. Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs look forward to reviewing the results of the second phase of the Wilderness Camp Program review in September.

Committee Members are concerned that there have been no decisions as of yet on which camp operators will be receiving capital acquisition money from the Department. It is recalled by Committee Members, that during the discussions on the Interim Appropriation, that the capital requirements for the Wilderness Camps were included because decisions on disbursement were imminent.

In discussions with the Minister and his officials it became apparent a decision had not been made because there were two new operators who hadn't finalized their Service Contracts with the Department within the expected time frame. This would be an acceptable explanation to Committee Members, if it did not appear to Members that a decision had already been made. The Committee was made aware of a camp operator in one Member's Constituency who had already been refused capital funding for the 2000/2001 fiscal year. This confirms for Committee Members that, it is necessary to establish program standards for the Wilderness Camp Program that provides for a "level playing field".

Committee Members would like to thank the Minister and his officials for examining the reasons behind the under-utilization of the Deh Gah Gotie operated adult wilderness camp and providing a written explanation to the Committee.

It is hoped that the Department will make every effort to encourage suitable adult offenders to take advantage of the programming available through the Deh Gah Gotie Wilderness Camp.

North Slave Territorial Correctional Centre

Committee Members had difficulty in accepting the "proposed" name for the new correctional facility in Yellowknife. Committee Members thought that it was inappropriate to include a local geographic distinction in naming an institution that is territorial in nature.

The Committee was pleased to hear from the Minister and his officials that the name "North Slave Correctional Centre" was only being used to identify the project. The Standing Committee looks forward to the recommendations of the Departmental Committee that is expected to report on prospective names for the new correctional facility in July 2000.

Probation Officers

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs support the establishment of a stand-alone probation service for the Northwest Territories. The advantages are twofold. The separation of the probation task from the social service task will improve social service delivery at the local level and will also provide increased sentencing options for the judiciary and Community Justice Committees.

In the opinion of the Committee Members there is a need to make a decision on the placement of the probation officers in the near future. Even though Committee Members would like to see Probation Officers in as many communities in the Northwest Territories as possible, it is realized that this is not probable. Therefore, to ensure that our employees (Probation Officers) have stability in their lives, the Department should make their decision on community placement and live with it in the interim. (Committee Members are of the opinion that opportunities to adjust the placement of Probation Officers will present themselves in the future through resignations and internal competitions)

Some Members were concerned that the way Departments presented information confused northerners in that, clear distinctions were not made between constituencies and administrative districts. Committee Members would appreciate future Business Plans and Main Estimates establishing a distinction between constituencies and administrative districts.

Human Rights Legislation

The Standing Committee on Social Programs was pleased to hear the Minister's commitment to bring forward comprehensive Human Rights Legislation by November of this year. The Committee looks forward to its initial review of a legislative proposal on new Human Rights Legislation in the near future.

As this is only Canadian jurisdiction without Human Rights Legislation the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs view the passage and implementation of such legislation as one of the most important issues facing the Assembly.

Inmate Programming in Correctional Facilities

Committee Members believe that the Department has started down the right track in developing relevant adult inmate programming. It is unfortunate, over the last decade, that the current physical condition of NWT Correctional Centres and inmate overcrowding has resulted in dedicated program delivery space having to be utilised for inmate bed-space.

Committee Members cannot accept the diminishment of the educational component, as part of a priority setting exercise, in the development of programming for inmates in the NWT Correctional system. Inmate programming that focuses on behaviour modification is important, but Committee Members believe that an holistic approach must be taken.

Committee Members believe that in order to have lasting success in lowering recidivism rates it is important to treat the full spectrum of inmate problems. Anger management and cognitive skills development programs are important treatments but do not deal with all of the underlying conditions that lead to the commission of crime in the Northwest Territories.

Chronic unemployment in the small communities coupled with a low literacy rate, that severely limits resident mobility, creates a scenario that lends itself to despair. When we release an inmate back into his/her home community we are releasing them back into the same cycle that caused them to offend in the first place. In the minds of Committee Members, it is very important to offer offenders as many options and tools as possible, in order to give the offender a chance to make positive life choices.

Members of the Committee are becoming more aware of the terrible toll that illiteracy causes in the Northwest Territories. Offenders who cannot find gainful employment upon release, because of poor literacy skills, are more likely to follow the same path and return as inmates of the NWT Correctional Service. If an inmate cannot function in the outside world; the cycle of offending will repeat itself.

To take advantage of Adult Basic Education programs that are offered by the College in some of our communities, a minimum literacy level is required. If the offender being released has acquired those basic literacy skills in a correctional facility they have another positive life choice they can make when released.

Members of the Committee appreciated being supplied with further information on inmate programming. However, Committee Members still believe that an emphasis has to be placed on educational programming that targets basic literacy skills for offenders. There is some question in Committee Members minds as to whether the level of educational programming available in Territorial Correctional Facilities meets Corrections Canada requirements. If these standards are not met, the chances of federal offenders doing their time in our facilities are reduced. Members would appreciate the Department investigating this concern.

Finally, the Committee is pleased that the Department has developed special programming for those inmates severely affected by FAS. It is apparent from discussions with corrections officials that this programming has minimised conflict between FAS inmates and other inmates and staff. This has reduced stress for all concerned within the institution.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that the Minister of Justice instruct the Department to place a greater emphasis on literacy in developing inmate programming.

Stand-alone Courthouse

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs anticipate being kept apprised on any further developments on a stand-alone courthouse.

First Nations Policing

Committee Members believe this is an area in which the Department needs to concentrate more resources. The information on First Nations Policing in the Business Plans and the Main Estimates was poorly presented. Members could not clearly establish linkages between the various pots of funding available to this activity. Members appreciated the explanations provided by the Department and look forward to a better presentation of the information in the next Business Planning cycle, including a breakdown by community, as to where the funding was expended.

The discussions with the Minister and his officials left the impression that some funding from the federal Solicitor General was not available last fiscal year due to the inability of the two Departments to come to a funding agreement. It is understood that negotiations are going better this year. The Standing Committee on Social Programs looks forward to being informed of the successful conclusion of a funding agreement with the Solicitor General.

Young Offenders Review

Members were very concerned that the Department could offer no explanation why there was a significant increase in the numbers of incarcerated young offenders last year.

Committee Members understand that the information systems for offenders and the courts are being replaced this year. The Department advised the Committee that the previous information systems did not have the capacity to track any of the mitigating factors that may have lead to the sudden increase in young offenders in custody.

Members were disturbed that the Department could not discount any of the scenarios that were offered as possible explanations because of the poor quality of information that the information systems provided. Committee Members were pleased to hear that the Department is planning to do a manual review of the documentation behind this sudden increase of young offenders in custody. The Committee looks forward to being informed about the results of the review and being supplied with a copy of the report.

The inability of the information systems to provide relevant information on the reasons for the increase in young offenders in custody does not inspire confidence on the part of the Committee. Members question the ability of the Department to track adult offenders or to do long term operational planning. This emphasizes the need for quality information systems, which provide sufficient data for analysis. It is hoped that the new Corrections Offender Management System (COMS) and the new information system for the Courts will meet this need.

Committee Members plan to monitor this situation.

Affirmative Action

Committee Members were pleased with the success that the Department has attained in Aboriginal employment in the Corrections Division. It is apparent that transfer and developmental assignments, when used correctly, can help a department in meeting the GNWT goal of a representative workforce.

Members are not so pleased with the Department's efforts at the Headquarters level. Aboriginal people are underrepresented, particularly at the senior management level. The Department of Justice must apply to Headquarters the policies and strategies that accomplished affirmative action success in the Corrections Division. The Committee looks forward to improvements in Aboriginal representation at the Headquarters level.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs is pleased that the Department has implemented a Lawyer Bursary Program for aboriginal students. This initiative coupled with mentorship and summer employment opportunities could help the Department meet affirmative action goals in the future.

Targets and Measures

Members were disappointed by the lack of measurable targets and goals contained in the Department's Business Plan. Members look forward to the next Business Plan having recognisable targets and measures that will define how the Department will meet its goals. Without targets and measures the Standing Committee has no way of gauging how the Department is performing and whether its policies and practices are conducive to meeting its goals.

Family Law Backlog at Legal Aid

The Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs are concerned about recent media reports stating there is a backlog of 123 family law cases in the legal aid system. Members became very concerned when the Department revealed that there is no plan to deal with the backlog. Members question the Department's lack of action and believe that the problem will not go away just because the Department chooses to ignore it.

It is noted that legal aid clients, who are most affected by the backlog, are not in a position to resolve any of their issues without help from the legal system. To leave families in limbo, awaiting lawyer availability is not an acceptable course of action on the part of the Department or the Legal Services Board. Committee Members note that this is a forced growth issue and without a course of action on the part of the Department and the Legal Services Board the problem will get worse.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that the Minister direct the Department to co-operate with the Legal Services Board on a course of action that will clear up the backlog of family law cases in the legal aid system in the short term.

In the long-term the Committee would like to see a plan be developed that ensures this situation will not repeat itself.

Informatics Plan

Members were very disappointed that there was no correlation between the Informatics Plan in this year's Business Plan and what was presented to the previous Standing Committee on Social Programs for the 1999/2000 Business Plan. The Department went from being hailed for the best Informatics Plan in last year's Business Plan to being short on useful, detailed information. This particular example emphasizes the need for transition between Business Plans.

Members did appreciate the subsequent response that outlined the Department's success and failures in meeting last year's stated Informatics goals. The Department appears to be making progress on updating its information systems for the 21st century. The Committee looks forward to an improved Informatics Plan in the next Business Planning cycle.

Position Report Explanation and Employee Appraisals

Members were somewhat mystified by the Department's Position Report. It initially appeared that there were 101 vacancies for 355 positions, the highest vacancy rate of any Department. It was made apparent that the true number of positions was skewed by the requirement to keep a position open while the incumbent is on a transfer or developmental assignment. Committee Members would appreciate the Department presenting its Position Report next budget cycle with footnotes explaining its actual employee numbers. Members also noted that the Department did not include the percentage of employee appraisals that had been completed in the Business Plan.

Alternative Justice

The Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs have great hopes for the Department in the area of Alternative Justice. It is felt that by allowing the communities to take control of their own problems, solutions can be found that do not impact on the justice system and lead to healing in the community.

The Committee was pleased to hear that work is progressing on evaluation and accountability frameworks for Community Justice Committees. Members are particularly concerned that the Community Justice Specialists have the tools to be of assistance to the Community Justice Committees. The money to travel to assist communities in setting up Justice Committees is crucial during the formative stage.

This leads the Standing Committee to wonder whether there are enough Community Justice Specialists as more and more Community Justice Committees start up. The Members ask that the Department monitor this situation to ensure the quality of service that the Community Justice Specialists can provide to the communities remains constant and does not suffer from overloading.

Victim Impact Statement Policy

The Standing Committee on Social Programs looks forward to being supplied with a copy of the Victim Impact Statement Policy. The Committee believes that this policy will become an important component of how sentencing is accomplished in the Northwest Territories.

Business Plan Format

Committee Members are concerned about the apparent trend among the Departments to include vitally important information in an overhead presentation instead of as part of the Business Plan itself.

Since the information contained in the overhead presentation never becomes part of the public record, it becomes hard for the Committee to hold the Department accountable.

The Accountability and Oversight Committee will make a recommendation on this concern.

Northwest Territories Housing Corporation

General

The NWT Housing Corporation works with the Local Housing Authorities and other concerned citizens and non-governmental organizations to achieve acceptable results in the provision of housing in the Northwest Territories. The Housing Corporation aims to ensure there is adequate social housing available for those who need it and that there are affordable housing options available for those who can look after their own needs. The Housing Corporation also supports NWT based construction and manufacturing with high Aboriginal participation.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs met on May 30th, 2000, to review the draft 2000-2003 Business Plans and the draft 2000/2001 Main Estimates of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

Committee Members were generally satisfied with the Business Plan of the NWT Housing Corporation. Committee Members realize that the Corporation is doing what it can with the reduced federal social housing funding that it receives.

Senior's Housing Strategy

The Committee was surprised to see a strategy referenced that was obviously used to formulate the Business Plan of which the Members were not previously aware. Committee Members can understand how the transition between Assemblies and the amount of work that we have expected our employees to accomplish in getting ready for the budgetary cycle of the first year of our mandate could have led to this oversight. However, Committee Members strongly believe that if a strategy or new government position is going to be used to formulate a Departmental Business Plan the Committee should have ample opportunity to review and comment on the strategy prior to its use as a policy base.

Committee Members also believe that there is a need to integrate programs and services for seniors. This is particularly true of the Departments in the social envelope. The result will be access that is simplified and streamlined. This Government has appointed a Minister Responsible for Seniors. The Committee is of the opinion that this appointment is a first step in meeting the needs of NWT Seniors. However, Committee Members believe that with the increasing seniors population much more needs to be done.

The Committee appreciated being provided with a copy of the strategy subsequent to meeting with the Minister and his officials. Committee Members reserve the right to comment on the Seniors' Housing Strategy following detailed Committee review.

The Committee recommends that when a Department or Corporation plans to use a new strategy or policy they have developed in formulating a Business Plan that the strategy or policy should be provided to the Committee in advance of the budget review;

And further, that the Committee be given every opportunity to comment on new strategies and initiatives prior to their use as a basis for setting government policy.

In addition:

The Committee recommends that the Departments in the Social Envelope form an inter-departmental working group, under the leadership of the Minister Responsible for Seniors;

And further, that this working group should conduct a study and provide recommendations on how the Government of the Northwest Territories can better streamline and integrate the services that are offered to Seniors;

And furthermore that the Minister report on the findings and recommendations of this inter-departmental working group to the Standing Committee on Social Programs within one calendar year.

Harmonization between Income Support (ECE) and Social Housing

Both programs contain provisions that discourage people from seeking active employment. There is no incentive for a person on income support and living in social housing paying \$32 per month to take a lower paying job when he or she is no better off because of higher rent and loss of income support.

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs are pleased that this long-outstanding issue between the NWT Housing Corporation and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment is scheduled to go in front of Cabinet. Committee Members look forward to a briefing on the Harmonization Plan in the near future.

Committee Member's major concern with the Harmonization Plan was that the Corporation realizes that it is vitally important an effective communication strategy be an integral part of the Harmonization Plan. Any time that this government changes the way in which it delivers its core services, it is imperative that these changes be communicated to the clients in a timely and appropriate manner.

Committee Members were pleased to hear that a communication strategy is part of the Harmonization Plan and look forward to reviewing that component of the Harmonization Plan.

Extended Downpayment Assistance Program and Mortgages

Committee Members are aware that in some communities the potential for loan defaults exists under the Extended Downpayment Assistance Program (EDAP). A client's circumstances of life can change for the worse, resulting in loan defaults to the lending institution.

Committee Members have heard of Housing Corporation Officials assisting EDAP clients refinance with the bank and even cases where the Housing Corporation has lowered the mortgage payments for the EDAP client by increasing the amount that the Corporation finances through the EDAP Program.

However, it was confusing to Committee Members to then hear from the Minister and his officials during the Business Plan Review that there was nothing the Housing Corporation could do to help clients in a loan default situation. This does not agree with what Members have heard happening in some Districts. The attitude that it is a matter between the bank and the EDAP client may not be an appropriate approach.

It appears to Committee Members that there is no clear policy to guide the Housing Corporation in providing assistance to an EDAP client who's in danger of defaulting on their mortgage with a lending institution. Given that, in all likelihood, an EDAP client who defaults on a mortgage will end up in social housing the Corporation should have a policy to guide their approach to these individuals. It appears from information provided by the Corporation that the problem is not as severe as some Members believed. Nonetheless, Members believe that there is a need for a definitive policy.

Reduced Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Funding

Committee Members are well aware that the current level of CMHC funding will be sunsetted on a sliding scale over the next thirty-eight years. Members of the Committee share the Minister's concern that this will have an extremely detrimental effect on the ability of the Corporation to deliver new public housing and to maintain the existing housing stocks.

Members of the Standing Committee were pleased to hear that the Federal Minister has agreed to meet with his provincial and territorial counterparts for the first time in a number of years. We must take advantage of this opportunity to lobby for the restoration of social housing funding from the federal government.

The Committee strongly recommends the Minister's continued cooperation with other Canadian jurisdictions that were also adversely affected by the Federal Government's withdrawal from the provision of public housing funding to make sure that the Northwest Territories receives its fair share of any restored funding.

Committee Members also share the Minister's concern that because the Government of the Northwest Territories assumed the responsibility for Aboriginal housing in the Northwest Territories, the NWT is not eligible for any federal housing funding that targets treaty Aboriginal people.

The Committee recommends that the Minister continue to lobby his federal counterparts to ensure that the Northwest Territories receives a fair share of housing funding that targets Aboriginal housing, such as the On-Reserve Housing Program.

NWT Dev. Corp. and RWED Housing Market Development Strategy

Committee Members are very interested in seeing the results of the proposed strategy between the Housing Corporation, the NWT Development Corporation and the Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development. The Committee understands that this joint strategy is aimed at developing private housing markets in communities that can sustain a viable housing market.

It is apparent to Committee Members that caution must be exercised in the development of a housing market creation strategy. There is a danger of creating an artificial market and thus the strategy becoming another "hidden government subsidy". Care will have to be taken to ensure that this does not occur.

Balancing Affordability and Economic Diversification

Committee Members held a wide-ranging discussion on the need to balance economic diversification against the desperate requirement for social housing in our smaller communities.

In the near future, the Committee notes that block funding may be an imminent part of self-government agreements. As a consequence, it becomes incumbent upon the Government and the NWT Housing Corporation to develop a policy that balances the need for northern spending and support for northern manufacturing against the desire to acquire the greatest amount of goods and services at the lowest prices.

Committee Members hope that the Deputy Minister's Working Group on Procurement Policy can possibly provide direction for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation in the years ahead. Committee Members look forward to the report of the Working Group.

Energy Conservation Strategy

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs were puzzled with the exclusion of an Energy Conservation Strategy in this Business Plan. The Committee notes that an Energy Conservation Strategy was an integral part of the previous two Business Plans. It was further noted that, the Housing Corporation in its presentation provided information that projected skyrocketing energy costs. Members could not reconcile the Housing Corporation's decision to abandon an Energy Conservation Strategy with present fiscal pressures on the Corporation.

Members were pleased that the Minister agreed with the Committee's position that the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation needs an Energy Conservation Strategy. Committee Members look forward to reviewing this strategy in the next Business Planning cycle in October 2000.

Targets, Goals and Base-line Information

As with other Departments that the Standing Committee on Social Programs reviewed during this budget cycle, there is disappointment on the part of Committee Members with the lack of clear targets and goals for the Corporation.

Committee Members pointed out that the Housing Corporation had goals and targets that were attained. However, the Committee notes that these goals and targets were not appropriately reported in the Business Plan. Examples included the Corporation's plan for dealing with the building-piling crisis in the Inuvik area and the plans for decreasing core need in the communities.

Committee Members believe that the discussions held with the Minister and his officials led to greater understanding on the part of the Corporation as to the quantity and quality of information that the Committee expects to see when setting goals and targets.

Committee Members did appreciate the Department assigning measurable targets to their goals in correspondence received by the Committee subsequent to the discussions with the Minister and his officials. Committee Members look forward to the next Business Plan for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation reflecting that understanding.

Action Plan for the Housing Corporation Versus Core Needs

Members were pleased to see that the Housing Corporation had developed a 4-year Delivery Plan that covered Capital Acquisitions. However, Members could ascertain no reason why these Delivery Plans could not be included in the Business Plan instead of being provided to the Committee as part of an overhead presentation. Committee Members are concerned that vital information that should be provided to the general public is not available by virtue of its non-inclusion in the official Business Plan. This is an issue for other Departments as well, and the Accountability and Oversight Committee will be making a recommendation concerning this issue.

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs could find no direct correlation between the 4-year Action Plan and the Core Needs identified in the 2000 Housing Needs Survey.

If Committee Members are to believe that progress is being made in meeting the core needs in the communities there has to be a direct linkage between these two documents.

The discussion between the Committee and the Minister and his officials focussed on how information on repairs and new construction could be presented to the Committee. Currently, the information is hidden in the grants to the Local Housing Organizations. Members of the Committee were pleased to hear that the activities of the Local Housing Organizations are laid out in Business Plans that the LHO's provide to the Housing Corporation. Members look forward to the next Business Plan cycle and receiving this information presented and linked to the community core needs. The Committee thanks the Minister for this commitment.

The Committee did appreciate that, subsequent to the commitment by the Minister the Committee received copies of the Capital Plan and the pages from the 2000 Housing Needs Survey that identified Core Need in the communities. This still does not address the Committee's concern of whether the Corporation is reducing Core Need in the communities. The Committee Members feel that they need to know how many units are being repaired and replaced in the communities in each year and how this affects the overall Core Need in the community. The information provided by the Corporation does not accomplish this. Members hope that the Corporation will be able to provide this information in the next Business Planning cycle.

Quality of Information in Business Plan and Main Estimates

Members appreciated the effort that the Housing Corporation put into ensuring that all of the additional information requested by the Standing Committee was provided.

Members were also impressed with the quality of information that the Corporation included in its Affirmative Action Report. Committee Members were also pleased with the success that the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation has realized in achieving affirmative action parity.