



GNWT Encampment Response Framework

When an encampment is identified in Yellowknife, the GNWT follows a coordinated, multi-department approach focused on support, safety, and consistency. Our newly developed GNWT Encampment Response Framework clarifies the roles, responsibilities, decision-making, documentation, and communications for when an encampment is reported, confirmed, monitored, supported, or considered for closure. This framework gives departments one clear approach for working together with the City of Yellowknife, the RCMP, service providers, and Indigenous and non-government partners.

The response described in this framework depends on staff availability, partner capacity, operational conditions, and legal authority at the time of the event.

The GNWT's Guiding Principles for responding to encampments include:

- treating all people with dignity and respect, at all times;
- focusing on housing, support, and risk reduction before considering displacement, when that is possible and safe;
- using trauma-informed, culturally safe, and voluntary engagement whenever possible;
- recognizing that many encampment residents are Indigenous and that responses must reflect reconciliation and Indigenous perspectives;
- protecting the safety of residents, staff, nearby communities, and the public; and
- using consistent records, fair process, and only the information sharing needed for service delivery and operational safety.

Roles and Responsibilities

Housing NWT

- Coordinate Coordinated Encampment Response Team (CERT) and keep overall situational awareness.
- Maintain regular reporting.
- Coordinate housing pathway planning, service connections, and follow-up after major



site actions.

- Act as the single GNWT operational point of contact unless another arrangement is approved by CERT.

Department of Health and Social Services

- Advise CERT on available health, mental health, addictions, and social support options.
- Provide guidance on health risks, wellness concerns, and harm reduction supports.

Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs – Integrated Service Delivery

- Coordinate frontline outreach when assigned by CERT.
- Make respectful contact with residents and help connect them to services should they choose to access them
- Document outreach.
- Support communication with residents about site visits, cleanup timing, and service options.

Department of Environment and Climate Change

- Confirm land authority and identify any land-use or environmental issues on GNWT-administered lands.
- Lead site remediation planning on GNWT land, in coordination with Housing NWT and other partners.

Department of Municipal and Community Affairs – Office of the Fire Marshal

- Provide technical and regulatory advice on fire safety and support consistency with municipal fire authorities.

Department of Justice

- Provide legal advice on notices, procedural fairness, privacy, jurisdiction, and proposed legal steps.

Department of Infrastructure

- Advise when encampments may affect GNWT facilities, operations, critical assets, or culturally significant sites.



City of Yellowknife

- Municipal Enforcement supports complaint triage, site visits, notices, and actions on municipal lands.
- Fire Division supports fire education, fire risk assessment, and emergency coordination.
- City staff coordinate municipal communications and site management within their authorities.

RCMP

- Involved when there is violence, a credible threat, a court-directed role, or other public safety risk that requires police presence.
- Does not lead outreach or service engagement.

Non-Government Organizations and Service Providers

- Essential to trust-building, outreach, shelter access, housing navigation, cultural support, and service connection.
- Can provide observations and service records to support decision-making, in accordance with privacy requirements.

Response Stages

Step 1: Detection and Activation

Encampments are logged and assessed, and a Coordinated Encampment Response Team (CERT) is convened within 24 hours.

Step 2: Initial Site Assessment

Outreach staff connect with residents to:

- offer shelter and housing options;
- provide access to health and social supports; and
- understand individual needs.

Engagement is voluntary and conducted using trauma-informed and culturally respectful approaches. CERT assesses site and determines level of support needed.



Step 3: Engagement and Support (ongoing)

Residents staying at the encampment have been identified and outreach from CERT continues on a regular basis.

All contacts, offers, referrals, and outcomes are to be recorded.

Should CERT identify risks at a site, the following steps (Steps 4 – 7) will be taken.

Step 4: Risk Mitigation and Coordinated Site Management

CERT coordinates actions, timelines, and department responsibilities when a site is identified as presenting a managed risk, such as fire hazards, sanitation issues, environmental concerns, repeated critical incidents, or impacts on the surrounding community.

Residents are made aware of the situation, why it's happening, and what supports remain available.

CERT to determine whether mitigation is working, whether the site can remain under monitoring, or whether Stage 5 must be initiated.

Step 5: Consideration of Legal Options

Should risks remain significant after engagement and mitigation, or legal obligations require action, the land authority will determine how to proceed. Decision and rationale must be recorded.

Outreach will continue during this time, and planning by CERT will include transportation, storage for belongings where feasible, and culturally appropriate support.

Stage 6: Closure

Should a court order be made, and the conditions for site closure have been met, Housing NWT will coordinate operations with partners. The RCMP may play a role if there are public safety concerns and/or lawful enforcement needs. Other site remediation roles are confirmed before and after the closure of the site

Residents' belongings are stored where feasible, and instructions on how to retrieve them are provided.

The authority responsible confirms when closure is complete, and what follow-up is required.

Stage 7: Aftercare and System Learning

Once a site closure, partial removal, or intervention has occurred:

- Housing NWT is to coordinate follow-up services;
- CERT is to complete a debrief and document lessons learned, repeat risks, and needed



system changes;

- reporting is to be completed by Housing NWT; and
- CERT is to determine whether ongoing monitoring is needed, and what practice changes should be implemented going forward.

Key Principle

The primary goal is to support encampment residents in accessing safer housing options and connecting them with available services and supports while maintaining safety for both residents and the broader community.

This framework has been reviewed by the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs, Housing NWT, and the Department of Environment and Climate Change.



Deputy Minister
Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs

May 28, 2026

Date



President and CEO
Housing NWT

May 28, 2026

Date



Deputy Minister
Environment and Climate Change

May 27, 2026

Date

