

## **NWT Disabilities Council Questionnaire**

### **Responses Submitted by Kevin O'Reilly, Candidate for MLA Frame Lake**

*1. What do you think are the key barriers facing people with disabilities in the NWT?*

Access to buildings and maneuvering in Yellowknife poses a lot of challenges for anyone with a disability that affects their mobility. Long winters with snow conditions and icy patches make getting around difficult. Ramps are not always cleared appropriately and it takes more energy to propel a wheelchair over snow and up and over curbs.

People with cognitive disabilities may lack programs that are geared specifically for their level of function as we tend to put diverse groups all together under one roof. Residents of smaller communities often lack support services especially as they become adults.

There is still a level of stigma attached to living with a disability that will require continued awareness raising campaign. Some good work has been done around FASD, autism and Alzheimer's but more needs to happen as there are many different conditions and there is still discrimination.

*2. How have you engaged with people with disabilities in your campaign? What steps have you taken to make your campaign more accessible? Do you have a campaign office and is it accessible?*

I believe people with disabilities should be treated with dignity and respect. It is important to hear their concerns and to act on the issues they raise. My campaign office is in the upper level of the Centre Square Mall and is accessible. I have also personally assisted a disabled voter who is not resident in Frame Lake, with information about mobile polls.

*3. Are you familiar with the Disability Action Plan released by the 18th Assembly? What are your priority items for this plan? How do you plan on advocating for these items?*

The GNWT Disability Action Plan has four priority areas including Person and Family Centred approach, Inclusion and Accessibility, Awareness, Education and Training and Coordination, Evaluation and Reporting. The priorities are supported by five objectives: increase income security and reduce poverty, build awareness and knowledge through education and training, improve transition planning and options, encourage universal design and living options, improve access and quality of caregiver supports. All of these are important. An area of particular interest is inclusion and accessibility. Accessibility requires more attention to design of new buildings and renovations to limit any barriers to participation by providing physical and sensory access. It also involves having more access to funding to renovate homes for accessibility. Inclusion requires an open attitude and attempt to make sure everyone, from children to seniors can participate, a

richer experience for the whole community. The objective of living options raises the need to develop more supportive living homes that allow people with disabilities to fully participate but receive the assistance they require.

4. *Are you familiar with the extended health benefits programs operating in the NWT? Are you committed to eliminating discrimination from the Specified Disease Conditions Program and introducing comprehensive supplementary health insurance for low income residents?*

o <https://www.nwtautismsociety.org/advocacy>

o <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/nwt-government-programviolates-charter-rights-freedoms-1.5176840>

I am aware of the discussion paper published by the NWT Autism Society and raised the issue in the last sitting of the 18<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly <https://kevinoreillyframelake.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2019-08-16-MS-Extended-Health-Benefits-Program-Review.pdf> and <https://kevinoreillyframelake.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2019-08-16-OQ-Review-of-Extended-Health-Benefits-Program.pdf> I agree that we need to move towards a rights-based approach to providing services for all disabled persons in the NWT. There are several programs that offer supplementary health coverage in the NWT. Extended Health Benefits for Specified Conditions, Extended Health Benefits for Seniors and Metis and Non-Insured Health Benefits for First Nations and Inuit. The Specified Conditions program is based on certain diagnoses and is likely to exclude new diagnoses or not fully recognize the needs that arise with a specific diagnosis. I agree with the suggested approach to offer comprehensive supplementary health insurance for low income residents. However, I would maintain the other programs for Seniors and Metis. Non-insured Health Benefits for First Nations and Inuit is a federally funded program that should continue as well. An important development on the national level is funded Pharmacare program.

5. *Are you committed to repatriating people with disabilities who are from the NWT back to their home communities/regions who have been sent out of territory for care? How will you work to increase the services and supports available to people with disabilities in the NWT to ensure that all residents are able to live with their own families and within their own communities?*

The repatriation of out of territory care is a complex issue as it involves different types of care facilities that the NWT may not possess due to our small population base. However, we should try whenever possible. My focus would be to try prevent southern placements with early intervention and improving access to services and supports for people with disabilities. This would include regionally based rehabilitation services, training for school personnel, health care service providers, home support workers, families and care givers. The issue of placement in a person's home community also affects many seniors as admissions are considered on a regional basis. Access to families is very important but especially for those who require more support.

6. *How do you plan to engage with the needs of people with disabilities in your constituency if you were to be elected? How do you plan to ensure that policies and programs implemented by the 19th Assembly are accessible to all NWT residents?*

I personally deliver a newsletter once a year to homes in Frame Lake and will continue this practice. Getting back to constituents on any issues raised is an important principle to follow. This has included constituents with disabilities. As an MLA, I have a duty to help constituents become more aware of programs that exist and to overcome barriers stopping them from accessing them. As I support the Disability Action Plan, I will work to ensure measures that are required for its implementation are properly funded and carried out. The issue of public knowledge of political decisions and their follow-up is very important to me. I have requested many measures that promote this including better websites, more information on Committee webpage and communications plans for important initiatives. It will also be important to ensure there is clear public reporting on progress of the Disability Action Plan and regular consultation with the NWT Disabilities Council.

Kevin O'Reilly

Candidate for Frame Lake MLA

Campaign Office: Unit 190, Upper Level, Centre Square Mall, Yellowknife

Phone: 867-920-2929 Campaign Office 867-444-2929 Cell

E-mail: [kevin@kevinoreilly@framelake.ca](mailto:kevin@kevinoreilly@framelake.ca)

Website: <https://kevinoreillyframelake.ca/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/kevinframelake>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/KevinOReillyforMLAFrameLake/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/kevinformlaframelake/>